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ADVENTURE

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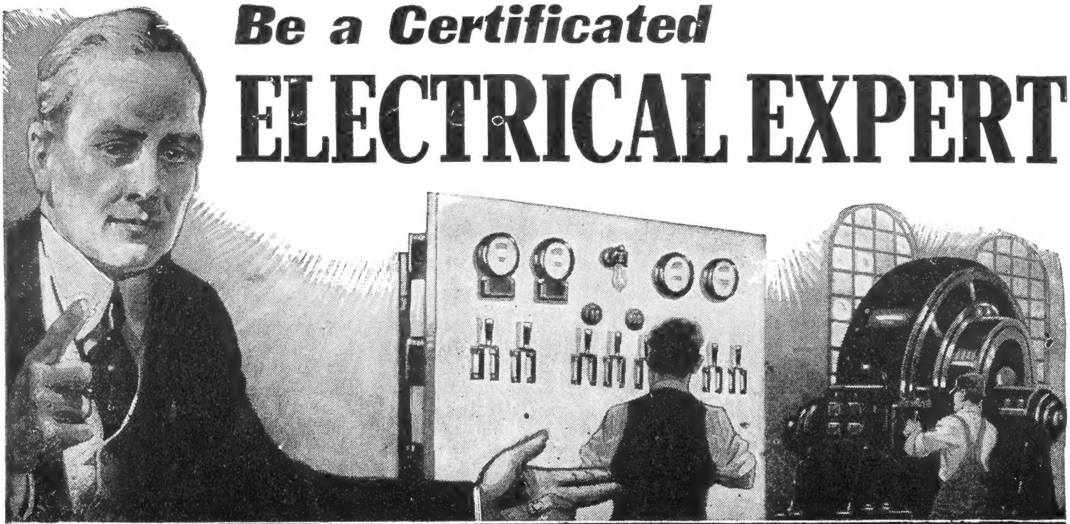

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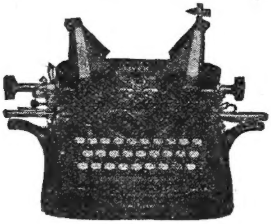

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ADVENTURE
August 18th, 1921

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Volume 30
Number 4

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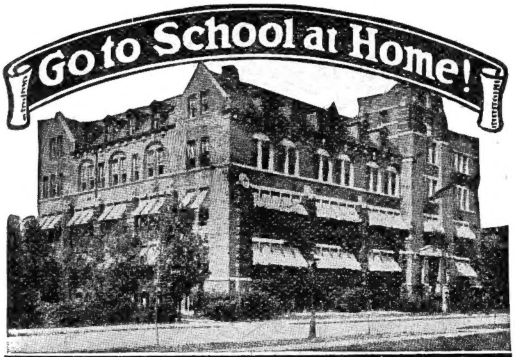

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VOL. XXX
NO. 4

AUGUST 18th. 1921

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The editor assumes no risk for manuscripts and illustrations submitted to this magazine, but he will use all due care while they are in his hands.

Contents for Mid-August, 1921, Issue

Murkwood Spears . . . . **Farnham Bishop and Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur** 3
1110 A. D.—and a kingdom reels to the clash of arms.

White Men . . . . **Gordon Young** 69
The call of race in the South Seas.

The San Marcos Affair . . . . **Russell A. Boggs** 78
The station-agent turns man-catcher.

To Shed Blood *An Off-the-Trail Story** . . . . . . **Konrad Bercovici** 89
Gipsy knives.

The Electric Horse . . . . **Crosbie Garstin** 97
Cowboys meet the original Ananias.

The Doom Trail *A Five-Part Story Part II* . . . . . **Arthur D. Howden Smith** 100
The terror that lurked in the wilds of New York Colony.

Ev'rybody Likes a Gunman . . . . **Max Bonter** 129
Crook and detective drink with death.

**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

(Continued on next page)

(*Continued from preceding page*)

The Throwback *A Complete Novelette* . . . . . . **Ferdinand Berthoud** 135
The African diamond mystery.

Tackline's Adventure . . . . **Stanley S. Schnetzler** 156
A little ruckus in Gibraltar's Garden of the Gobs.

Ghost-Pipes . . . . **Stephen Chalmers** 164
A Scotch pibroch that made Indian medicine.

Sweetwater Range *Poem* . . . . **Lew Sarett** 178

The Camp-Fire A free-to-all meeting-place for readers, writers and adventurers 179

Various Practical Services Free to Any Reader 185

Ask Adventure 186

Weapons, Past and Present 187

Fishing in North America 187

Lost Trails 191

The Trail Ahead 192

Headings . . . . **Hibbard V. B. Kline**

Cover Design . . . . **John Held, Jr.**

OVER the shoulder of Mount Elgon and into the bowels of forbidden Africa a reckless young American follows the lure of a blood-stained charm. "BURIED GODS," by Charles Beadle, is a novelette complete in the next issue.

THEY'RE a tough town and rough people, and when *Sleepy Stevens* and *Hashknife Hartley* buck up against their peculiar ideas of law and order, six-guns and dynamite are used to bring the argument to a grim conclusion. "LAW RUSTLERS," by W. C. Tuttle, is a complete novelette in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

Adventure VOL. XXX NO. 4

AUGUST 18th
1921

MURKWOOD SPEARS

A COMPLETE NOVEL

by Farnham Bishop and Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur

Author of "The Hand of the Mahdi," "With Sharp Sword-Edges," etc.

CHAPTER I

THE ROTTEN REIVER

THE Castle of Monrepaire thrust one square tower skyward, like a devil's finger mocking the patient heaven. Sir Giles de Gislac, the nearest neighbor, loved to call it "Maurepaire," thus changing its name from "My Retreat" to "Den of Wickedness;" for Sir Giles was fond of a grim jest.

But the shock-haired, sullen tenants of Monrepaire spoke plainer still, since to them it was no jest at all. Blunt Saxons of the sort that faced the Conqueror at Hastings, they called it "Reiver's Roost;" their pet name for Sir Richard, its castellan, was "The Rotten Reiver." They never called him so to his face. It is indeed doubtful whether he ever heard this ugly nickname, since the country-folk still lived to curse him, to sweat at the tasks he set them, to pay him starvation taxes.

Young Geoffry knew nothing of all this. It was he to whom Monrepaire really belonged, with its castle, broad fields, grazing-lands, forests, and the inhabitants thereof, both animal and human; but he was not allowed to take actual possession. Being under the strict guardianship of Sir Richard, his father's brother, Geoffrey meddled not at all in the affairs of the estate.

A good, dutiful boy, he saw only what his uncle wished him to see. His mind was sufficiently taken up with his glowing young dreams, in which brave deeds of chivalry and feats of arms formed a gleaming background for the face of a certain fair lady. With these preoccupations, how could he be expected to notice the pinched features, the despair-ridden eyes of his tenants or the occasional disappearance of those who murmured too loudly?

It was just this bent for dreaming that had disgusted the boy's father. Old William de Monrepaire, a turbulent giant of a man, had maintained the estate and added to it by the strength of his sword-arm, taking care always to make his enemies those who were the enemies of the late king, Henry I. So the king loved him, permitting

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him to keep the lands he snatched from less prudent vassals.

William's sword was a notable one, the only love to which he had ever been faithful. He despised his son because Geoffrey lacked the old Norman blood-thirst and the good old Norman miserly selfishness. He feared that the boy would let Monrepaire go to the dogs or lose it to some hard-hitting neighbor.

So he took the precaution, in the sixteenth year of King Stephen, of making his brother Richard Geoffrey's guardian. The terms of the wardship, established by royal act, debarred the lad from succession till he should have killed his man, begotten him a son and added to the property as much land again by the proper Norman use of his sword. Having read the royal signature at the bottom of the act, old William smiled a wry smile and died in peace.

Sir Richard shared his brother's opinion of Geoffrey, but was too shrewd to show it.

The Rotten Reiver was not only a tyrant; he was a diplomat as well. While nearly every other Norman in England flattered and flouted the unhappy King Stephen and spent their days dabbling in treachery or cutting one another's throats, Sir Richard managed to keep on good terms with king and barons alike.

His unfailing good manners, his merry conversation, his quiet determination to mind his own business kept him out of trouble.

And no one wanted to molest the mighty walls of Monrepaire, stuffed as it was with hard-faced men-at-arms. In a word, where an honest man would have incurred every one's suspicion, the Rotten Reiver obeyed the king and got on well with every one but the poor and weak.

"Keep your tongue sheathed, and you need not unsheathe your sword," he was wont to say to his nephew. "Give to the church, and the church will leave you alone. Keep your fields well tilled, your tenants in hand and your walls twinkling with spear-points. Then you may live in peace."

And indeed he had the reputation of a quiet, inoffensive man. Yet somehow all knew that he was dangerous, though there were few in England who so much as guessed the venom in him.

There were rumors, of course. Tales were told of villages burned, chapels pillaged, merchants robbed and strung up by the thumbs; men and women cut half to pieces for the few pence they had scraped together. It was said that a dying Cistercian friar, horribly slashed and burned about the fingers and toes, had recognized Black John, captain of Richard's men-at-arms.

But no one really believed such scandalous things. None of them had happened within forty miles of Monrepaire. It was generally assumed that Sir Richard was one of the four or five really peaceable Normans in the kingdom, and he was respected for it.

I say no one believed these rumors. The tenants of the Monrepaire believed, and so called him the Rotten Reiver. With the surprizing faculty of the Saxon for collecting two and two and deducing four, they pieced together many luscious bits of gossip tossed about at cross-roads and wattle-and-daub alehouses.

Also Sir Giles de Gislac believed. But no one cares what tenants think, and Sir Giles was too honest to have friends.

Consequently when Sir Richard rose to the sweetest June morning in the rare, stirring Summer of 1153, he was content with himself and with nearly all the world. He liked to have people think well of him; he had taken care to have them think well of him, except that he did not care what Giles de Gislac thought. He liked, too, to take the air on the square-cut battlements of Monrepaire, whence he could gloat over the fair demesne he misruled so prosperously.

He was a lean, straight man, gracefully made, and a score of years younger than his age. A temperately athletic life had kept his cheeks abloom with the crimson Norman underflush below the brown. His neatly trimmed black beard was barely touched with gray. Large, soft brown eyes gave almost a tenderness to his expression; when one looked straight into them, they shifted. Two or three times in his youth fools had taken that shifting glance for cowardice and tried to take advantage of it. Twenty-year oaks flourished above their graves.

Turning his sinewy shoulders to the grim, square tower that overlooked the Flamwell river, the Rotten Reiver strolled along the long west wall of the bailey—which he himself had added to the original keep—toward the twin-turreted southern gate. A light, crisp breeze flirted with his scarlet robe.

The view he commanded swept down majestically from all sides of the looming castle rock; almost sheer to the east and west, tremendously high and rugged to the south, the crag dominated the rolling Flamwell valley and tyrannized over its checkered, hut-dotted fields. The river embraced it in a horseshoe loop, a natural moat, except below the southern battlements.

There the arrogant height of the rock and the well-made wall defied assault. Beyond the twin turrets, a flat desolation extended for half a mile, strewn with blackened stumps. Here the outer fringes of the Murkwood had reared their ancient trunks, till the Rotten Reiver had blotted them out with ax and flame lest they mask the approach of an enemy. He had no enemies, save only Giles de Gislac; but the Rotten Reiver took no chances.

Beyond the desolation lay the Murkwood itself; a fine oak forest, God knows how great, and all Sir Richard's.

"Aye, all mine!" he murmured comfortably. "All mine—fat red deer, brave trees and nigh an hundred foresters!"

A WELL-MADE spearman passed him on his rounds and brought his pike to the salute. Nodding carelessly, Sir Richard passed by, then suddenly swung about.

"Alain!" he said in a voice both gentle and arrogant.

The man-at-arms came to heel like a whipped dog, for all the reckless courage in his hard face.

"My lord?" he answered.

"Send my Lord Geoffrey hither."

The soldier started off at a trot, his pike jogging absurdly over his shoulder. The Rotten Reiver continued his walk, but he no longer smiled. The thought of Geoffrey always disturbed his calm. Geoffrey alone stood between him and the full, unquestioned possession of Monrepaire.

The young man's footsteps on the stones behind him brought him about. Sir Richard turned in his stride with a strong, free swing and stretched out his hands. His fine eyes beamed with affection, which Geoffrey's cordially returned. Indeed Geoffrey loved his uncle, having always received devoted tenderness from him. The Rotten Reiver had excellent control over his feelings.

They were an oddly assorted pair. The trim, cat-like beauty of the elder was dwarfed by the boy's blond magnificence, by Geoffrey's massive shoulders and depth of chest, by the proud carriage of the yellow-crowned head; but it did not seem dwarfed. Each, in his way, was a masterpiece, though the boy had inherited what Richard had not—the huge frame that went with the Monrepaire blood.

Straight from old Fulk of the Red Hands, who came over with William the Conqueror, the men of Monrepaire drew their giant strength, their fierce hearts. They were fearless as eagles, savage as wolves. In exchange for old Fulk's bulk, Richard had inherited all his terrible courage, directed by a shrewdness all his own.

Geoffrey had blue eyes and a straight nose and a glance that never shifted. These with his yellow hair had come from his Saxon mother, who had been about as happy with old William as Saxon generally was when yoked to Norman. Since she was not made to bend, she had been broken and had the good luck to die young.

The boy's affection for his uncle brightened in a smile. He loved his guardian, never having been permitted to see the devil in him.

"Ah, Geoffrey, Geoffrey!" Sir Richard rebuked him. "I never see you now unless I send for you. Not so many months ago you were glad to be with me. We have had good sport together, you and I. But now——"

He stifled a sigh and spoke more cheerfully:

"A fair, brisk day, lad. Wilt go hawking with me?"

The young man flushed self-consciously, scraping the flags with one foot. But his eyes looked steadily into his uncle's.

"Will you return before sunset?" he asked.

Richard smiled.

"I had hoped to try the Eddlesmere bank," he answered. "There are herons in the reeds."

Casting his eyes down, he watched the boy covertly.

"Then we should get back late," Geoffrey objected. "Gladly would I go with you, but I must be back in time to ride out tonight."

A red light kindled in Richard's eyes and died down at once. He was too wise to ask questions; besides, he had more knowledge of the young man's secrets than Geoffrey of his. He laughed outright, half-mockingly, with an undertone of tenderness.

"When I was young," he gibed, "I could be made to do just three things: hunt, hawk and fight. You have never lifted a sword save in exercise; you hunt only with Big Blaise and me. Yet you have business that forbids you to hawk with me on the bravest morning of the year."

Geoffrey looked uncomfortable, but offered no explanation.

"How can I fight?" he countered in boyish evasion. "There is no war."

"Why, you can not. But if there is no war to take you from me, there is—love, perhaps?"

The soft brown eyes, gentle as a woman's for all the ugly soul behind them, rested affectionately on Geoffrey.

The boy turned crimson. When he spoke, his voice was almost curt—

"And if there is?"

"Then I shall be very glad. I am getting old and would pass over the cares of Monrepaire to stouter shoulders. You remember your father's conditions?"

"I remember," Geoffrey answered carelessly.

Then after a pause—

"They are hard conditions."

His voice grew louder and more tense:

"It is not so ill a thing to marry, if a man find one he can love; but to kill—why must I kill a man to be thought a man myself? Has not enough blood been shed since Stephen became king?"

He broke off, stammering with excitement.

Sir Richard let the question pass.

"Then you have found one you can love?" he asked.

His features were aglow with benevolence. Breathless as a boy is with a secret he longs to share, Geoffrey opened his lips for full confession, but shyness overcame him. He blushed again and nodded.

"That is good," his uncle praised him. "And her name? Is it, perchance, one of Delahay's girls or the lovely widow of Whitton?"

Geoffrey shook his head.

"Margaret de Gislac," he replied, glowing with pride in his love.

But Sir Richard went white to the lips. Master of his emotions as he was, the sheer madness of the thing broke down his guard.

"What—what?" he stammered. "Not Giles's daughter?"

Even as he spoke, he fought for self-control, at last achieving a smile; but it was not his best.

"Why not?" Geoffrey asked.

His tone was stubborn.

The Rotten Reiver knew that tone: the Saxon blood was stirring in the lad's veins.

"Because you are a Monrepaire," he replied, "the son of William, the grandson of Fulk. Because, since the first of our race laid the stones of that strong tower, there has been hatred between us and the blood of Gislac. Because you are of a stock too proud, too great, to have traffic with broken folk.

"Think, lad! Your marriage must bring our house new strength, more wealth, wider influence, richer lands. Giles de Gislac barely holds the roof over his head. Nobly born though he be, the king distrusts him, the nobles despise him. Why, Umfraville and de Born have waited these three years for a chance to cut his throat.

"And you—you may marry an earl's daughter. There are not ten families in England who have called themselves by the name of their estates or held the same castle for the king for eighty years, as we have done. You, to marry de Gislac's daughter! Fulk would come red-hot from hell to haunt you!"

GEOFFREY'S lips were clamped together in a thin line. He no longer blushed; his face was set and resolute.

"If my grandfather is in hell," he answered stiffly, "he has his own wickedness to thank for it. I am beginning to learn how the serfs curse our house and what good cause they have. My grandsire won his wealth by murder and pillage; my father was as bloody a man as ever lifted sword. At least de Gislac is honest, merciful and just. I should be proud to marry his daughter."

Sir Richard bit back the hot words he wished to say. Argument was useless; he was wise enough to be gentle.

"Forgive me," he said softly. "You must see how your words surprized me. I have been de Gislac's enemy all my life. Let me think upon this matter."

In spite of himself Geoffrey was a little ashamed.

"I did not mean to hurt you, uncle," he cried. "Indeed, I love and honor you. You were ever kind to me, kind beyond measure. You have been my protector, my comrade and friend."

The older man kept silent, his face turned away. He seemed so deeply disturbed that Geoffrey's heart was touched. He almost felt guilty. To reassure his uncle more than to justify himself, he went on:

"I can not give her up, sir. I know you would not ask me to break my word. I—have asked her to marry me, and she has consented. But—if you wish me to, I will not go to her today. I will go hawking with you, if you will have me. Let me go with you, sir. We used to ride together so often."

Sir Richard realized that the boy had conceded as much as he would. His last words had been a boy's appeal, a boy's attempt to make amends. But silence had brought the Rotten Reiver counsel, and he turned a kindly face to Geoffrey.

"I was not prepared for your news," he said gently. "Yet I desire only your happiness, my nephew. Your father left you to me as a sacred trust. I should be false to my trust if I denied you your love. If she will have you and Sir Giles consents—Has he consented? No? Well, if he will, take her with God's blessing and mine.

"No, do not thank me. Ask Sir Giles tonight. It may be for the best that our two houses should end their ancient enmity in this way. If so, then the sooner the better. I will not go hawking after all. Ask Father Ambrose to come to my chamber."

When Geoffrey had gone, overflowing with gratitude, Sir Richard paced to and fro in deep thought. At last, cursing under his breath, he walked rapidly toward the tower. His private quarters were in its second story, comprising a cell-like sleeping-chamber, an oratory and a gaunt, bare, four-square room between the unfaced stone walls. It was pierced with long arrow-slits for windows, unlovely in its wild strength, ill-fitted with massive pieces of crude oaken furniture.

Sir Richard entered the great room and began mechanically removing odds and ends of gear from the one comfortable chair —an old glove, a falcon's hood, a pair of spurs, a fine hauberk of Spanish mail.

In his preoccupation he did not notice Father Ambrose enter. The priest was noiseless as a cat. Father Ambrose smiled a little and sat down in the comfortable chair. Then Sir Richard noticed him.

A short, plump Benedictine, he seemed the impersonation of good-humor. Even the bare round tonsure on his head and the bare sleek feet were eloquent of innocence. But there was something coldly evil, something secret in his eye that suited the black gown he wore rather than the rosy jollity of his cheeks.

"Regarding that chapel—" the priest began; but Sir Richard cut him short.

"You shall have as much as you wish for it," he promised. "Now forget the chapel for a while. I sent for you to ease my conscience."

Father Ambrose puffed out his fat cheeks.

"What deviltry are you up to now?" he asked softly.

The Rotten Reiver caressed his beard.

"The boy has beaten you," he said abruptly. "I told you to get him into a monastery. Well, you have failed. For all his milk-sop ways, he has the blood of a man in him. He is in love."

The little priest nodded cheerfully.

"So I thought," he observed. "No, he did not tell me, but I have wits under my shaven poll. Only the other day he said to me: 'Father, I can not enter into my estate till I have killed a man. It is an evil thing to kill, except in defense of the king or to protect the weak. Since there is no war, I must ask my uncle to give me six men and send me out against the outlaws beyond the forest.'

"I asked him what outlaws he meant, and he answered, 'The devils that sacked Merton and tortured the people for their gold.' When so mild a lad thinks of fighting, there is certainly a girl in whose eyes he reads himself a man. No, we shall never make a monk of Geoffrey."

"If you had tried——"

"Tried? By the blessed blood of Hailes, I have tried! Again and again have I recounted to him the peace and joy of the monastic life, the blessings reserved in paradise for holy men. I have taught him to hate bloodshed and plunder; I have done all I could to unfit him for the life a man of birth must live in these days. I have pointed to the cloister as the only refuge for a man of his soft stamp, assuring him that salvation is certain only for them who join Christ's flock. And now he talks of marriage? You may say good-by to your earldom now!"

Sir Richard nodded. Here in his private chamber with the massive door barred he had let the mask fall from his face. Yet it was not what men call an evil face. It was schooled, calm, with scarcely a wrinkle.

If anything its natural expression was benevolent, a little merry even. Above all it was a discreet, watchful face, the face of a gentleman. For so Sir Richard had made it, knowing himself so well that he watched himself as closely as he watched others.

So far as he could, he shut himself off from his crimes, so that his evil soul should not carve them in his features for all to read. Now those features showed only grave attention, slightly relieved by an upward turn to the corners of the lips.

"Merton, eh?" he repeated. "That amuses me. What would the lad say, I wonder, if he knew that the loot of Merton Abbey is even now in my treasure-vault?"

"Or that it was your man Blaise, his own companion, who strung up the members of the town corporation and built little fires under their feet?"

"He seems determined to come into possession of Monrepaire. He complained, but now, that his father's conditions were hard. He has won the love of Gislac's daughter."

The priest's little eyes twinkled.

"And what said you to that?" he asked.

"I gave him my blessing."

FATHER AMBROSE got to his feet with a look of portentous shocked righteousness.

"You are quite the wickedest man alive, Sir Richard. You want me to ease your conscience, do you? I am generous in absolution, but I fear the sin you meditate will strain even my complaisance. I suppose you mean to poison the girl? You could send the venom by Odo, who has a secret love for Lady Margaret's tirewoman."

The Rotten Reiver shook his head, with just the ghost of a laugh.

"He would grieve for her, forget her and find another. At his age lads change loves easily. I must strike at the root of the matter. If he can not be made to enter a cloister, he must not marry. In his state there is but one safeguard against marriage. After all, he has old Fulk's blood in him."

"Therefore now a crime is necessary?"

"I think so. I have begun to prepare. But nothing must go wrong; we must make certain. Once I can get clear title to Monrepaire, the Lord Chancellor will make me an earl in reward for my loyalty.

"But the boy's claim to the estate blocks my earldom. The Chancellor can do nothing till Monrepaire is out of Geoffrey's hands."

"Then?"

As the priest uttered the word, it seemed heavy with evil. Sir Richard dropped his eyes, asking—

"You will give me full absolution?"

Father Ambrose looked blank, scowled, and finally nodded.

"But you must build my chapel and pay a thousand marks to the prior of my order that masses may be said for me when I die. If a priest can be damned, you have come very near to damning me. But how will you reach the boy? Not here?"

Sir Richard shook his head.

"I bade him ask Sir Giles for the girl's hand tonight."

Father Ambrose crossed himself.

"Beside you," he muttered, "the devil is a saint!"

"Mayhap," the Rotten Reiver shrugged. "Send Odo to me."

CHAPTER II

GISLAC

HIS uncle's farewell lingering like a saintly benediction in his ears, Geoffrey mounted in a flaring circle of torchlight. His great gray Flanders mare sprang through the round-arched gate, rocketed down the ramp that sloped to the Flamwell bank between zigzag, battlemented walls and shot across Flamwell bridge amid the outcries of the astonished warders.

Often as Geoffrey had ridden out by night, he had never spurred so furiously, never before galloped down the perilous ramp. But tonight his heart was higher than its wont, so high that its beating intoxicated him.

The moon was up early, round and silver-bright. It turned the fields to fairy meadows, painted a glistening edging on the angles of the castle crag as he rode around it toward the south and the Murkwood and outlined the rim of the forest in sharp blackness that seemed a-bristle with menace.

He rode alone, unfrightened of wood or night, heedless of men. The road to High Tower, the stronghold that sheltered Giles de Gislac and his daughter from evil foes that were worse than Winter storms, lay aslant through the forest itself. Few men were brave enough to trust themselves, night or day, in the black secrecy of that wood. The country-folk thought that devils dwelt there and witches and lovely elf-women that dragged men from their horses and bore them beneath the earth.

Be that as it may, the Murkwood was the haunt of men worse than elves or witches, so that wise folk never traveled it save in strong companies.

But Geoffrey had no need to fear. His clean conscience defied Satan and all his fiends; the violent men who infested the wood were his uncle's foresters or broken outlaws who enjoyed the Reiver's protection. Perilous as they might be to harmless strangers, they cringed at the name of Monrepaire. Moreover, drawn by love, the boy had ridden that way so often, alone because he shared his secret with no one, that the way had lost all terrors.

Through the heart of the Murkwood no man might ride; but across that eastern angle whither he rode, the avenues of oak were like the columned aisles of a cathedral, straight and clear. It had once been a royal forest, before the first Henry had given it to old William, his faithful vassal.

So through the dark forest-aisles Geoffrey rode on, his heart singing and his lips singing in tune. The song rang bravely through the gloom, the gray mare's hoofs beating steady time. His blue cloak blew back in the fresh night breeze, his yellow hair tossed about his cheeks. Once or twice—not oftener, for the branches arched far above in an almost impenetrable screen—a fleeting moonbeam struck fire from his light steel cap. His long Norman sword clanked in its scabbard. Now and then it thwacked his horse's side, and the gray snorted at the stroke.

The darkness and the mighty imminence of the ancient trees might have oppressed another with intolerable fear; but Geoffrey rode to love and the full glory of manhood. He felt, indeed, that tonight he had become a man. In an hour's time he would be with Margaret, Margaret of the dark hair and glowing eyes. As one man to another, he would make his request of brave old Sir Giles and place the ring of betrothal on his bride's finger.

Then, to prove his new-found manhood, he would do some deed worthy of his love, that she might be proud of him. She should be able to say that marriage had brought her no unfledged boy, but a soldier, who came to her wearing his honors proudly.

"I will speak to my uncle tomorrow," he said aloud. "I will bid him give me men and horses, that I may try my sword on the merciless thieves that oppress the land. Glory of God! That is better than tournaments, better far than enlisting under the banner of some bandit like our neighbor Umfraville."

He was so bemused with his glittering dreams that he rode unaware straight into a blaze of firelight. Shouts rang in his ears, steel clanged threateningly, and a great voice cried:

"Stand, or I drive an arrow through your liver!"

Geoffrey pulled in so sharply that his horse pawed the air. His right hand went to his sword-hilt, though he knew defense was useless against determined bowmen. He could see a score of men, no more than black shadows that seemed to dance against the firelight. A hand seized his bridle, and a bearded giant of a fellow loomed between him and the flames. Geoffrey could feel the man's eyes boring into him.

"Who art thou to stop de Monrepaire?" he asked haughtily.

The forester fell back and sank to his knees.

"Pardon, my lord," he quavered. "How should I know who ye were? I should have done ill to let any fly-by-night ride through your wood unchallenged."

"It was well done," Geoffrey agreed. "Yet it is well for you that you did not stop Sir Richard so roughly."

He flung a silver coin, which the forester caught deftly as it gleamed in the light. His spurs pricked the gray mare's side; and as he rode by in the firelight, the trees seemed to rush forward to swallow him up.

The Flanders mare held her long, matchless stride, eating the distance till she bore him out of the gloom into the moonlit splendor of the open meadows. Now he could hear the ripple of the Sollett, fed by a dozen brooks of the forest, winding pleasantly in its deep-cut reedy bed.

The white light bathed its water in beauty. Along its bank he rode, till he struck the path worn deep by men and beasts down to a gravelly shallow; and here the mare plunged splashing through.

Already he could see the sturdy keep of de Gislac on its hill—a single tower, tall, but so thick as to seem squat, and stout enough to hold a host at bay. High Tower boasted no outworks; a deep, dry moat spanned by a drawbridge was commanded by the grim height of the keep itself. But the bridge was raised.

As the mare's hoofs rang on the stony road, a voice challenged from the wall.

"Monrepaire!" Geoffrey answered.

Only the scream of chains on metal drums replied to his signal; but the drawbridge sank slowly down; a heavy portcullis rose like iron teeth in a monster's opening mouth. Two torches appeared in the archway, gleaming on polished armor.

As he dismounted, a man-at-arms took his horse and led it into one of the stalls that lined the ground floor of the tower on three sides. Here the beasts of the household were kept; on the fourth side the garrison and humbler servants lodged.

HIGH TOWER had been a great place in the Conqueror's time. It was out of fashion now, but though rude, its size and strength made up what it lacked in modern comfort. It was more than a hundred feet square within and each wall was twenty feet thick of dressed stone.

The second man guided Geoffrey up the stone stair that angled up the walls. As they mounted higher, the draft from the long, narrow arrow-slits blew in their faces. At the end of the first flight a slender, thick-walled arch confronted them, and two more men-at-arms stood aside to let them pass. The light from their out-thrust torches illumined a corridor and a second door beyond. Geoffrey's guide knocked, and a hearty voice bade them enter.

"You are already announced, my master," the soldier said, and went down the stair.

Thrusting the door open, Geoffrey stepped into the room that had been almost a second home to him for many months. It was a roomy hall, lighted by pine torches and three-foot candles of wax in wall-brackets. Here also the Summer breeze blew in freely through a score of arrow-slits, stirring the dusty hangings deep-embroidered with figures of knights that seemed to stir and strike as the wind bellied out the heavy cloth.

A huge table of solid oak with oaken chairs and benches about it was close to the center of the hall, beside a fire-pit that was now cold and empty from disuse. Silent, hawk-featured men in steel mail, armed with pike and cruel-bladed gisarm, stood about the walls. The floor was ankle-deep in scented rushes; falcons perched on the sooty rafters.

From the shadow beyond the table a form stirred. A tall man, seeming huge in the half-light, rose slowly and came forward. As he moved toward Geoffrey, the light from a candle fell athwart his face. Giles de Gislac was all a Norman warrior should be: his face was squarely made, with bold, frank features, a high arched nose, a stern square jaw, great black eyes that held a gleam of smothered fire and firm lips framed in a maze of fierce black beard. His body was indeed huge and still powerful as in his youth. His shoulders might have borne a church, as the romances say; and his great arms swung at his sides with a smooth motion that breathed power. The loose robe, girded with a loose silver belt, only served to emphasize the overawing strength of the man.

He thrust out one hand, surprizingly small for one of his size, and crushed Geoffrey's fingers in his. The fierce face lighted as he spoke his welcome, in a voice low and gentle but vibrant with reserved resonance:

"*Benedicite*, boy, and welcome. Is all well at Maurepaire?"

Geoffrey winced a little at the grim pun, and Sir Giles, seeing, laughed softly.

"Nay, forgive an old soldier for the grudges of his youth. I meant no harm, lad. Your roof shelters at least one friend to Gislac."

Geoffrey's eyes were serious. Usually Sir Giles made him laugh, for the old man was a merry soul in spite of his grim ferocity in a quarrel. But tonight the boy was sober with his errand. Aye, sober, now that he was on the brink of broaching it. His high spirits had passed, for he was soon to ask the question of his life. He drew a long breath and plunged into the midst of it—

"You may have more than one friend in Monrepaire, if you but choose."

Gislac's black brows knit, and he shot a swift glance at his guest. He spoke a quiet command; the mailed men withdrew out of hearing.

"What mean you?" he asked abruptly.

Geoffrey's answer came swiftly, athrill with the force of his desire—

"I have ridden hither as fast as horse would carry me, to ask Lady Margaret's hand in marriage."

For a moment Gislac's eyes bored through him, seeming to pass like a cold blade through his heart. Then—

"I knew this would come, Monrepaire."

Geoffrey thrilled again to hear himself addressed for the first time as master of his own domain. The rich voice resumed slowly:

"I hoped for it, after a fashion, for I know of none who would make my girl a better, truer husband. We Normans are a savage folk, stained with blood and sin; yet you, though half a Norman, are unstained. Untried though you are, I know your heart is that of a man.

"Not for nothing have I commanded men and fought with men. Your soul is an easy one to read, and the text is an honest one. But your uncle is my enemy—the kind of enemy I can not stomach, though I am not squeamish. So I have feared this moment, as well as hoped for it."

"My uncle—" Geoffrey began; but his friend interrupted him:

"You would say that your uncle is a better man than I think. You are wrong; but I will not offend you more by proving it. Love him if you can; I love him not. What says he to this affair? You have spoken with him?"

"You wrong him" Geoffrey protested. "He himself, when I told him of my love bade me ask you and gave me his blessing."

Sir Giles turned aside and paced up and down the room plucking at his great beard. From beside his chair a great wolf-hound rose, slow and majestic, and kept dignified step with its master. At length the old warrior turned to face his guest.

"I do not wish an alliance with your house," he said bluntly. "A friendless man, surrounded with enemies, I am too proud to want friends. Least of all do I wish for alliance on your uncle's terms. I neither like nor trust him.

"For twenty years he has intrigued against me, sparing neither flattery at court nor gold to hire one brigand noble after another to attack me. I will not say that he dares not face me in fight, for no de Monrepaire was ever a coward. But it has suited him to use treachery, and that I can not forgive.

"Nevertheless, because I know and honor you, I will not say no. I could not give Margaret into better hands. If she will have you, I consent."

THE SNATCHED up a silver bell from the table and struck out a ringing note with his dagger-hilt. A lithe, graceful woman entered.

"Bid your mistress come, Arlotta," he commanded.

The maid bowed and passed between hanging curtains with tarnished silver tassels.

The minutes passed, while Geoffrey gazed past Gislac's shoulder toward those once sumptuous curtains. Through them Margaret must come from her bower; his heart pounded with anxious impatience. The old Norman knight watched him with a strange smile, half-humorous, half-melancholy. Then, all life in that room seeming to be suspended till she came, a slim white hand parted the hangings and Margaret de Gislac passed through them as through an arch of triumph.

At her coming it was as if the great hall burst into life and bloom. It was not the light in Geoffrey's eyes, the old man's cheerful change as he drew her to his side. It was rather the surprizing, vivid loveliness of herself, the sheer vitality of her beauty.

The April sun works such transformations, when it turns a day of gray gloom into splendor with one bright flash between the breaking clouds.

She was tall and strong, as became her father's daughter, but in her, strength only served to emphasize the soft, sumptuous grace of her carriage. From her tiny feet, their delicacy stressed by the lines of her silken shoes, to the smooth crown of her hair she was one lithe, living curve, at once supple and rounded.

Her eyes glowed with the same intense, warm depth that one sees in the heart of a burning brand; but they were black, impossible to fathom, seeming to absorb the gaze of him who looked at her and draw him into her very soul. No man could read those eyes; they were too deep, too like light itself made incarnate.

The bloom of her cheeks was so perfect as to seem not human, yet its very perfection appeared an essential part of her. As the strong colors of nature never jar but blend in a harmony more than mortal, so the rose of her cheeks, the flaming crimson of her lips blended in glory with her eyes, with the pulsing whiteness of her throat, with the soft, warm hair enveloping her head and nestling in wavy coils about her ears. They were little ears, close to the head, white, with the pure richness of mother-of-pearl. And every feature, every surprizing attribute of beauty, was so attuned to all the others and to her stately majesty that none could say wherein she was most beautiful.

The two men warmed to her presence as plants lift to the sun. Slowly she looked from one to the other. Her color deepened and her lips parted over small white teeth.

"You have spoken, Geoffrey," she said, and her voice was her father's purified—deep, soft beyond mere music, as when a perfect bell is touched gently.

Geoffrey looked his astonishment; she merely nodded, her eyes unfathomable as the sea.

"You could not hide it, either of you," and she laughed ripplingly, throwing back her head so that her throat gleamed like an alabaster column.

"He has spoken," Sir Giles answered slowly. "It is for you to decide, my daughter."

She looked straight at Geoffrey, drawing his gaze and holding it.

"I have decided. Geoffrey knows my answer."

With a smothered cry of joy the boy fell at her feet, caught her hand in his and crushed it to his lips. Stooping, she laid her free hand on his head, playing with his yellow hair, and said happily—

"Rise, Sir Geoffrey, my knight, brave man and true!"

And as he rose, her eyes once more drew his, till he flung both arms about her and kissed her lips.

"After the betrothal kiss, the ring," he said, his tones unsteady with the force of his happiness.

While yet her fingers lay caught in his, he placed his ring upon the betrothal finger, where its ruby glowed against the white flesh.

It seemed to Geoffrey that his joy was too great to bear alone. He turned to Sir Giles and was confused to see the old man's cheeks wet.

"God keep you both, my children," Gislac cried. "Ye are too fair for this wicked world."

CHAPTER III

A STROKE IN THE DARK

GEOFFREY'S head was awhirl as he rode out from High Tower. Youth takes its joys madly and is soon intoxicated by its heady emotions. He would have thought on his great fortune, tasting it lingeringly; but the sheer force of his love rose within him like a tempest, blowing his senses along with it irresistibly. He gave the gray head, letting her take him where she would; she chose the homeward road, as a horse will.

Down the steep hill of High Tower, across the fields, splashing and spattering through the brook she pelted, and Geoffrey neither checked nor guided her. The moon had set. It was black dark. But for him neither night nor road nor earth existed—nothing but his love.

Less than a mile beyond the Sollett, Gislac's land ended and his own began. But just before the boundary lay a deeper blot of darkness, where a clump of willows grew beside a brook. Save for them, not a bush nor a tree stood between the river and the Murkwood. The willows were no more than a blacker blackness in the heart of the night. Geoffrey would not have known of them had not a twig slapped his cheek.

The blow brought tears to his eyes and roused him from his dreams. He pulled slightly to the right; and as he swerved, a sharp, numbing pang smote him in the breast. His brain reeled; the night rolled in upon him, smothering him. He strove to cry, choked, and knew no more.

SOMEWHERE outside the tower of Monrepaire a nightingale sang; the darkness seemed to shiver, and a thin silver rift appeared in the east. Slowly the night dissolved; in the villages to the north and west cocks crew sleepy challenges. A steady, regular beat, faint but insistent, sounded somewhere far off.

A tiny tongue of fire pierced the gray gloom of the chamber; and from the oratory adjoining, Sir Richard stepped softly into the room. He was enveloped in a great cloak, for he felt the chill of dawn and had spent the night in prayer before the symbol of the Lord's Passion. Man he feared not, but God he feared terribly.

Yawning, he set down the candle and sank into the one comfortable chair. The steady beat outside grew louder, sharper, and turned up the stone ramp. It was a ringing drum of hoofs, the sound of a heavy horse galloping up the slope.

Sir Richard crossed himself and composed his hands in his lap, as if waiting for some one who must see no signs of agitation. The darkness was gone; a faint warmth pervaded the air; a single early sunbeam struck through an arrow-slit full on the Rotten Reiver's face. It was a calm face now, stately, sure of itself.

A low knock beat on his door. Without rising, he called softly—

"Enter, and be swift!"

The door swung open on noiseless hinges. A burly red-haired man in a stained mail hauberk entered, steel cap in hand. His bestial face, seared with brutality, wore an air of furtive triumph.

"Is it done, Odo?"

Sir Richard's voice was gentle as a woman's.

The fellow nodded.

"Done, and well done," he answered.

"You are certain?"

The man-at-arms held out, butt first, a heavy javelin, cut down from a lance. Its point was red with blood that had dripped and clotted halfway down the shaft.

"I drove it through mail and bone," he boasted, "and passed my knife through his throat to make sure. He will give you no more trouble."

"And then?"

"As you bade me, I rode to the forest as fast as horse would carry me, roused the foresters and told them I had found the corpse on Gislac's land. They will be here with the body within two hours. I went not back with them, but came straight to you."

Sir Richard rose.

"You have done well," he said with a strangely dragging voice. "Where did you wait while he stayed with Gislac?"

"In the field back of High Tower with Arlotta. She warned me when to start for my ambush. She knows his hours well."

"Good! Take this purse; it holds twenty marks. Leave your weapon here, lest it be seen. Send me Blaise."

As Odo's steps died away down the corridor, Sir Richard stood looking out upon the soft morning.

"It is a pity," he mused. "I think I could trust the man, but—the clack of one heedless tongue might cost me my earldom."

With the freedom of a confidential servant, Blaise entered. The Rotten Reiver beckoned the black-browed giant closer, grasped his shoulder and whispered in his ear. Blaise grinned.

"I never loved the hound," he said contemptuously.

"That is well. Be swift, before he gets to drinking."

Blaise tiptoed out.

For perhaps a quarter of an hour Sir Richard sat alone in his chamber. He was startled suddenly by a shout from the wall, a shout shrill with alarm. Mail-clad feet rang in the corridors; a heavy fist thundered at the door.

Sir Richard sprang to his feet, his well-controlled face simulating angry astonishment.

"What is it, ye dogs, that ye bay at my door?" he demanded.

A soldier stumbled in, gasping with excitement.

"If it please my lord, Odo the groom has fallen from the wall and lies broken on the rock."

The knight's jaw dropped.

"Is he dead?" he asked soberly.

"Dead as carrion."

"Take his body to the armory and bid Father Ambrose say masses for his soul. I will pay for a trental. He was a faithful man."

The man-at-arms sped away on his errand. Left to himself, the Rotten Reiver threw back his bearded chin and laughed silently.

CHAPTER IV

LOADED DICE

THE sentry posted at the northeast angle of High Tower shifted his weight from one foot to the other, yawned prodigiously and leaned against the cool stone merlon. He was weary, for his relief was near due. Yet, weary as he was, his eyes kept a sharp watch of the dark plain below, for Gislac's men knew their lord too well to shirk.

Even as he watched, he stiffened and peered out into the night. Minute after minute he stared, till that which had caught his suspicion grew near and clearer—a blob of flame bobbing on the level land toward the Sollett. Leaning his spear against the merlon, he walked swiftly along the ramparts and spoke softly to the officer of the watch. The latter's face, half-lighted by the smoky glare of a single cresset in the center of the tower platform, grew keen with expectation. The light flickered redly on his mail.

"We shall have something to do at last," he said quietly. "No man would stir on the plain on such a night if he were honest. Not with a torch. Where there is a torch, there are more men than one. Sir Giles should know of this. Do you tell him."

The sentry descended the stone stair which wound down into the bowels of the tower. Passed by the men-at-arms on guard at the landing at each turn in the corridor, he was halted at Sir Giles' door.

"My lord sleeps," the grim-faced guardsman rebuked him.

"I have news that will wake him, then," the sentry retorted. "Bermond's orders were to report to Sir Giles himself."

"On your head, then, if he is angered at losing his first sleep."

The guardsman threw open the door.

The bleak four-square chamber was dimly lighted by a single lamp. By its thin ray the sentry could make out the great form of Sir Giles on his narrow pallet and the black bush of his beard. Advancing to the couch, he laid a hand on his master's shoulder and shook him. The big man sat up, broad awake on the instant.

"There is a light on the plain, coming toward the Sollett," he announced. "Bermond bade me report."

Even as he spoke, Sir Giles was on his feet, reaching out for his clothes.

"Fetch me my hauberk and sword from the press yonder," he continued. "Good! Fasten this buckle. Now my helmet and shield. That will do. Rouse the lads below. Have the grooms saddle as quickly as they may. Be swift and be quiet, lest ye startle the women."

The sentry had scarcely left the chamber when Sir Giles was after him, settling his shield on his back with a clang accompanied by a shrug of his broad shoulders. Many a night alarm had brought him from his bed in the troublous years since King Henry died; many a seeming trifle, no more startling than this single light across the Sollett, had turned out the garrison of High Tower in force or manned its broad walls with spearmen.

In the reign of Stephen the weakly, honest men slept lightly and attached grim significance to the slightest things. Or if they did not, they died young, and men with harder fists and keener eyes enjoyed the treasure they had gathered.

Close behind Sir Giles followed he who had stood guard at the door, a broad-faced ax in his big gauntleted hand. The men-at-arms turned out as they swung down into the court of the keep, buckling the last straps as they hurried from their quarters off the guard-room, trailing their weapons. Horses were led out from the stables, saddled and bridled.

The great court was quick with lively, ordered bustle. The torchlight flickered on set faces, on armor that glinted as it was fastened about sturdy bodies, on the smooth coats of the beasts that were being led to their places before the great archway.

Catching sight of the captain of the wall, the knight strode to him, asking in that vibrant voice of his:

"Are they many, Gerard? Do they advance?"

"How many I know not, my lord. Bermond woke me but a moment since; it was his watch. He says the light still advances. He can not yet see who bears it. It is very dark without; there may be two men or twenty."

"Scarce twenty, unless they are half-armed. A score of shields clanging on mailed backs would be heard almost to the Murkwood. Richard de Monrepaire might be shrewd enough to muffle the shields, but I am making my peace with him. Ten men will serve us. You, Gerard, and Thomas, and you, and you, and you! Yes, Guillaume and Joseph too. That will do. Bermond, man the wall!"

Sir Giles swung to the saddle, took the lance that his favorite guardsman Thomas handed him, loosened his sword in its sheath and gave the command to raise the portcullis. The massive grating rose slowly in its grooves; the drawbridge sank with the scream of protesting chains and the riders of High Tower streamed out behind their leader.

From the slope of the castle hill they could see, still an arrow-flight beyond the Sollett, a single flame dancing slowly toward them. Nearer now it flared red at the edges; but as they clanked and clattered forward, it wavered and stopped.

"On them before they scatter!" Gislac cried, and the men of High Tower drove home the spurs.

Their long lances lowered, they swept down toward the river. There was no time to pick the ford; they rode straight in, up to the stirrups, up to the knees. They were past now, scrambling up the soft bank, gathering momentum for the final charge. The light was right before them. In its rays they could see a knot of blurred figures. An arrow hummed past, a second, and a horse shrieked in pain.

"Ride them down!" Gislac's voice sang loud and mellow like a silver trumpet.

The long spears flashed in. With an oath he who held the light flung it to the ground, where it spat red coals.

But the horsemen had closed in too swiftly. Four of the lances plowed through helpless flesh, while five baffled riders wheeled to search out those who had found hiding in the dark.

GERARD flung himself from his horse, snatched up the smoldering torch and swung it briskly about his head. In a moment the fat wood caught again and burst into crackling flame. Shouts rang on the night.

Like pouncing hawks, the riders pounded in pursuit of the fleeing prowlers. The plain was bare, devoid of cover, save for a single clump of willows. Gerard cried out in a view-halloo as the dark forms of running men scuttled toward the clump.

But the pursuers could see only what the irregular circle of light around Gerard's torch threw into relief against the night. Beyond that all was blank, blind. Three more of the pursued had been overtaken during that first flash of renewed brightness, but the rest were now somewhere beyond it, scattered like partridges in the murky gloom.

Again came the twang of a bow-string, and Gerard cursed with sudden fierceness. The torch fell from his hand as he slid out of the saddle. Sir Giles himself picked it up and rode for the clump of willows.

They who had fled beyond it were free from pursuit, cloaked by the night. But the pelting storm of three-foot shafts that burst from the cover of the trees showed that the fiercer spirits hoped to repel the horsemen and finish their mysterious errand. An arrow glanced from Gislac's helmet with a ring of metal; others sang past him. He alone was exposed; the torchlight showed him up perfectly against the dark.

His trained men-at-arms strung out fanwise on each side of him, closing in—themselves screened by the night—on the unseen bowmen in the grove. The fan-like charge opened into a horseshoe, the horseshoe into a circle, enclosing the grove completely.

Till the ring of men and horses was complete, the blind had hunted the blind, save that every man in Gislac's troop knew that plain as he knew his own ten fingers. Now, converging in upon the trees and the skulking archers behind them, each rider spurred toward them as straight as a sword cuts.

Then it opened up suddenly before them. They cast their long lances down, swords were drawn, while the riders swiftly narrowed the closing circle. A few footsteps scuttered away between the horses, but most of the enemy were in the trap. They had hoped to make their position good, but they had not known the terrible sureness of Gislac's veteran cavalry.

"Close!" Sir Giles ordered. "Take them alive!"

The horsemen drew in, beating the branches with their swords. A horse shied, a blob against the blackness shot under its belly, and its rider stabbed down with his point. A groan answered the thrust; the horse collapsed above its slayer, ripped from side to side.

This was too much. With one accord the men of High Tower dismounted, and beat steadily through the willows on foot. Only Sir Giles remained on horseback. He raised the torch high, throwing its glare full against the trees. Every branch, every twig stood out, for the grove was small.

Black figures and white faces sprang into sudden relief. Sullenly the captives came out of hiding, helpless to skulk or resist further. They were rangy men in close breeches and coarse jerkins of skin, unarmored and armed only with knives, having cast away their bows. They had not come for nor expected a fight. The horsemen bound them with practised dexterity and tied one behind the other with long ropes.

"Mount!" Sir Giles ordered. "We have as many of them as we shall be like to get."

But before giving the word to ride, he made a slow circuit of the willows, directing the torchlight into every part of the grove. He was sorely puzzled. These men were on his land in some force, yet they were too pitifully few to have meditated an assault on High Tower. He could not make it out.

The captives numbered eight; four had been killed in the first onrush and three more ridden down after Gerard had thrown the torchlight on them. Fifteen armed men lurking about his lands by night, yet not to assault the castle! More than fifteen. There was no knowing how many had slipped away in the darkness.

Whatever had been their purpose, there was nothing on the plain to reveal it. He would have to question them, once he got them to High Tower. Now he must be gone, for outside the four stout walls of his keep there was little safety for a man envied by all his powerful neighbors.

He was about to give the word, when his horse snorted and swerved violently to one side. At the same instant the light from his torch, now almost burned down, fell on something that lay in the ditch beside the road which ran between the willows. It was the body of a man, gleaming in fine chain mail, save for certain dark streaks that laced the hauberk and the pallid blur that was the face.

Gislac sprang from his horse and bent over the body, his flickering light falling full on the features, white and flecked with blood. Then while his men started in dismay, Giles de Gislac broke into a flood of savage curses. Never before had these men heard blasphemy from his lips, but now the bitter words flowed in a stream that sent thrills of fear coursing along their backs. At last he ceased and knelt a moment in silence, then:

"Here, Thomas, Joseph! Make a litter of your shields, quickly! Guillaume, you and André ride ahead with the prisoners; the rest will form the rear. How is it with Gerard?"

"Well, my lord," the captain's own voice answered. "A flesh-wound in the thigh, but that is nothing."

No man dared ask what had brought that surge of curses from their master's lips; none was near enough to see. Yet they knew, as Thomas and Joseph ran the shafts of their recovered lances through their shield-straps, that he who was to be borne on that rough litter must be one dear to Gislac. They counted over their number. Though two horses were down, the men were all there.

Sir Giles straightened himself, and they could feel his eyes upon them through the dark.

"Geoffrey de Monrepaire lies here, foully murdered," he said, in tones that frightened them. "Slain here, on my land, within the very purlieus of my castle. Raise him, lads —tenderly, fools! Bear him home. Oh, that I lay in his place and he were well and whole in my stead! Mercy of God!"

So Sir Giles and his men went home.

The body lay still on a low and narrow bed in the awful, quiet beauty of death. Sir Giles looked down upon it, his fine, sword-calloused fingers caressing the yellow hair. In his eyes was the bleakness of sorrow, sorrow that drove out wrath, sorrow too great to share its place with any other passion.

The room seemed already consecrated to Death, though the body had just been borne in. The smooth stone walls, the high, dim vault of the ceiling, the emptiness, the motheaten hangings—all breathed a calmness of gloom such as invests the sepulchre. The solemn silence was deepened rather than broken by the dying footsteps of the men-at-arms, carrying away the shields on which he had lain.

Minutes passed. At length Sir Giles, feeling the presence of another, glanced up, to see the thin figure of an old man in the doorway. He was slight and shrunken, with gray cheeks and thin white hair. His coat of shabby velvet trimmed with fur seemed for all its poverty to invest him with a meager dignity. A servant followed him into the chamber, bearing towels, a basin and a small locked chest.

"You are prompt, physician," Gislac's subdued voice greeted him. "Yet you come not in time. I have seen Death often, and you are too late."

The physician nodded and bent over the body.

"Help me with his mail," he said.

In the presence of that which lay on the cot, he took on an access of strength, a commanding force, not to be denied by power or the pride of blood. Sir Giles, kneeling, deftly unfastened the hauberk, slipped an arm under the inert form and drew the armor off. The physician drew his knife down the cloth of tunic and shirt and bared the still breast.

"A great wound," he breathed in a sighing whisper, "yet not so perilous as this."

He pointed to an ugly hole in the white throat, edged and caked with blood. "He has bled terribly."

The servant, accustomed to his duty, brought the basin to the bedside, opened the chest and laid it down beside the surgeon. Drenching a towel in warm water, the latter washed away the blood, bathing throat and chest as clean as possible.

A little blood still oozed from the hurts. He picked up one limp hand and felt the pulse; then drawing from his pouch a small steel mirror, he polished it and held it to Geoffrey's lips. Again he sighed, and his eyes met Gislac's.

"I find no trace of life," he said. "Yet he should be colder. Rigor has not begun to appear. There seems no hope; but I must work upon him yet a little. A woman's hand would help me more than yours, Sir Giles."

"Fetch Arlotta," Gislac commanded, and the servant disappeared.

The two men looked at each other by the bedside—the eyes of one sad with the sadness of the good physician, the other's desolate. They still stood thus when the woman came in. Sir Giles had sent for her in the wish of sparing Margaret, who still slept, knowing nothing of what had happened. She must know soon; there was no need to thrust her grief upon her prematurely.

Arlotta entered, rubbing her eyes, clad only in her nightrobe. Gislac went up to her.

"Here is one dead or dying, girl," he told her. "We need your help."

Until now his great bulk had stood between her and the head of the cot; now he stood aside and would have led her to the bedside. But as he withdrew, she saw the face of him who lay there. She dashed the loose hair from her eyes, stared a moment at the dead, white face and grew rigid. Her eyeballs rolled terribly; the color left her smooth cheeks; a ghastly shriek rang from her lips. Sir Giles sprang to support her, but she strove to thrust him off.

"Mother of God!" she cried, her voice hoarse and choked. "Oh, Christ have mercy! I did not know they would kill him!"

She fell suddenly in a huddled heap, moaning with fear and horror. The hpysician moved to her help. From the doorway the servant, who had returned with her, gaped in dumb surprize. But Sir Giles gazed down upon her with a smoldering flame in his fierce eyes.

"Take her away," he ordered. "Let old Martha tend her, and bid Thomas post a man outside her door. She knows more than she should."

Arlotta was half-dragged, half-carried from the room. Gislac turned again to the bedside.

"A man's hand must serve your turn," he said. "I will not wake my daughter to such a sight."

At the physician's direction, Sir Giles wet fresh cloths in the basin, which had been filled anew, and now trembled in the excited servant's hands, he laid the cloths across the wounds and wound them close. Meantime the old man selected from the box two vials, one filled with a vermilion fluid, the other colorless.

"What is it, father? Was it Arlotta shrieked?"

Gislac looked up with a start, to see his daughter Margaret standing beside him. He made to get between her and that which lay on the bed; but even as he moved, she saw. Her face paled, her lovely hands fluttered at her breast; but she bent down steadily to the pillow.

For a moment she stared at Geoffrey's face, then her hands went to his cheeks, tenderly, hesitatingly, and stroked them with trembling fingers. Her father's throat choked, and the tears trembled in his eyes.

The physician approached and would have drawn her gently aside, the unstopped vial with the deep-hued liquor in his hand. But she would not move. Instead she took the vial from him and made to carry it to the colorless lips of Geoffrey. His mouth was set, so that she had to part it with all the strength of her fingers and pour the medicine through his teeth.

After a moment's pause, while the hearts of all three watchers stood still, the physician raised the lids of Geoffrey's eyes and made a sign for the lamp. The light closer, he gazed at the pupils. Then he shook his head.

"It is no use," he pronounced. "He is dead."

The girl turned to him, her fathomless eyes filled with a strange light.

“No!” she cried, and her voice rang like a breaking harp-string through the room. “No! I will not have him die!”

She gathered the inert shoulders in her arm and bent down close to the torn breast. Her hair fell in a cloud about her lover’s face, and tears were falling between the black strands upon his cold flesh. Sir Giles turned away with a sob that wrenched his bosom.

Then suddenly, while her grief plucked intolerably at their hearts, the two men heard her laugh, softly, joyfully.

“We must get her away; she will go mad!” the physician whispered; but across his words her voice thrilled happily:

“He lives! He lives! See—he is not dead!”

The men stared, incredulous; but she was right. Across the still face, so grave but now in the majesty of death, a faint smile hovered. The eyes opened slightly of their own will. There was no color still, but life faintly stirred there. The physician touched Margaret’s shoulder and gave her the second vial.

“Not more than three drops,” he cautioned.

In that moment Margaret showed herself indeed a Gislac. Torn as she was with grief and joy, her nerves quivering with emotion too strong for a weaker will to endure, she was of a race whose women faced despair and widowhood as often as their men left their sides. The constant imminence of death, the menace of ambush, of merciless odds, of poison and the knife hung close about them, visiting the great as often as the humble, steeling their hearts to endure until they broke.

Nor was she weaker than those other women in a hundred other castles up and down the land. Rather her father’s blood was in her veins, a proud blood that feared nothing, hoped on to the end. Her fingers never faltered. Holding the vial steady, she poured just three drops between her lover’s lips.

The physician once more tested his patient’s pulse, holding the inert wrist long. At last he smiled.

“I had thought he had bled to death,” he said. “But the great arteries are unsevered, and the windpipe is not cut. He is strong; he may live.”

THE day was bright outside, but the sun’s rays could not penetrate the thick walls to cheer de Gislac’s dungeons. Their damp darkness was broken rather than lighted by the red glare of many torches, set in iron claws that reached out writhing tentacles from the massive pillars. Beyond these the occasional glint of dull metal hinted at iron bars or hanging chains; ugly shapes some long and angular, some fitted with terrible contrivances of brown-blotched steel, were pregnant with untold tales of human anguish. The air was close and musty, sour with evil smells.

More terrible than iron bars, more merciless than the mighty, oppressive walls, more ruthless than those deadly, brown-stained instruments of torture, was the man who sat enthroned at the end of a long, open space in the dungeons’ very center. Before him, in the full glare of the torchlight, stood eight disheveled men, bound, hemmed in by harsh-featured guards with drawn swords.

They could not see the man who sat in judgment on them. Not his figure, that is, for the shadow beyond the flaring lights concealed all but the dim patch that was his face, and the two unrelenting eyes that glared upon them. But upon their sullen faces the lights cast a full gleam, exposing them pitilessly to his gaze.

For more than an hour they had stood thus, bearing the stare of those eyes, bearing his searching questions in resolute silence. At any moment he might weary of their obstinacy and give them over to the tortures. They did not know that Gislac never tortured. He did not find it necessary.

Not knowing this, they faced his baleful eyes and his stabbing questions still, till that happened which he had foreseen. Unable to endure longer, one ran forward several paces, wrenching at the straps which bound his wrists. His will, which would not bend, was shattered by those awful eyes and that steady, overbearing will.

“Kill us!” he cried, his voice high-pitched with the agony of his overwrought nerves. “Torture us, but make an end of this mockery. Ye say we slew him, ye heap slander on the head of our lord. But I tell you, lord of Gislac, that you are his murderer. Not we, not Sir Richard, but you, Giles de Gislac, treacherously slew him, as he was departing from your hospitality!"

"Aye, aye! Well said, Robin o' Ware. Fling it in his face, man! He can but kill us!"

The prisoners, strained to the breaking-point, burst into sharp shouts of approval.

The glowing eyes flickered at them.

"Ye say I slew him?" he said softly.

"Aye, aye! Who else? He was on your land."

Sir Giles was silent, till his silence grated on their raw nerves. Bold, lawless men, who all their lives expected no end but a hangman's noose, they had no fear of death. They dared say anything now. It was a relief to shout, to curse, to defy those eyes that had held them under a spell so long.

"Then—as this man says whom ye call Robin o' Ware—ye serve Richard de Monrepaire?"

Now, too late, they saw that the eyes had trapped them. It was their duty, the command imposed upon them, never to reveal whose men they were. There was not one of them whom the Rotten Reiver had not saved from a deserved death or sheltered from the law. They were his bravos, his thieves, spies and assassins, hired at the highest price a man can receive—life itself.

It was his will that none should know he paid them; if they were seized, their duty was to declare themselves the masterless outlaws they seemed. Never had one of them revealed the name of the lord whose service brought him to prison or gallows—never until now, when the strength of Gislac's will had broken down their silence. They strove now, too late, to hide what they had revealed, behind a renewed sullenness.

"If I slew Lord Geoffrey and not ye, then ye are innocent men who came seeking his body? Is it not so?"

Silence.

"But how did ye know I slew him? What proof can ye bring your master, even if I let you go?"

Robin o' Ware snarled like a beast that gloats over its kill.

"Let us go?" he sneered. "Why not, seeing that seven of us are already free? There were two and twenty of us, and ye slew seven. There be but eight here in your hands. Long ere now the rest have sped to Monrepaire with word of the fray. Even before that, Red Odo spurred to the castle, having found Lord Geoffrey's body by the willows.

"Hang us if ye will! Little good will it do you or any in your house. Sir Richard may not save us, but he always avenges. We shall not be cold before his lances will hedge you round with a wall of steel. Look to your walls, that they be stout, murderer!"

"It was Odo, then, who bade you come for the body?"

"Who else? Have done. Hang us, that we may be quit of your questions!"

Gislac pondered a moment; then:

"Joseph," he said, "lead these men out by the postern, unbind them and set them free. Then fetch in the girl."

The prisoners turned incredulous faces toward him. They knew Norman mercy too well to believe that he would spare them. This was another trick, another ordeal like that they had just been through.

But this time they would not survive. He would tempt them with freedom, only to send death upon them in some terrible form. They did not know de Gislac always kept his word; they would not know it till they crossed the Sollett and looked back to the menacing tower, to see no horseman in pursuit, no spearman on their heels.

WHEN a single man-at-arms led in Arlotta, unbound and shaking with fear, the place was empty save for him who clutched her shoulder. Empty, she thought, till she saw those probing eyes staring at her out of the gloom.

Her heart turned to ice; she did not need to hear the cold voice to know whose eyes they were. They sank into her soul, pierced her with terror, and yet they held her so fast that she could not find the relief of fainting or hysteria. She was no outlaw of the wood. She dared not resist or deny.

"Thou didst not know they would kill him," the voice murmured.

She could scarce hear it. But she recognized her own words, uttered in the first horror of the night, when she laid eyes on Geoffrey's body.

"Thou didst not know *who* would kill him?"

She would have answered; but fear choked her.

"Didst thou know it was Odo who found his body?" the voice continued.

Arlotta cried out.

"Odo?" she gasped. "It was he—it was he who——"

"Speak on, wench, if thou wouldst live," the voice said.

It did not seem to threaten—rather to encourage, so soft it was.

She spoke then fully and fluently, with sobs that broke in now and then. He did not check her story.

"Odo loves me," she began. "He came often, always by night, when the Lady Margaret did not need me, being with Lord Geoffrey. Always he came when Geoffrey came, but an hour afterward. No one knew of his coming but me.

"Last night—I met him in the field behind the tower. He grew impatient—never had he waited so long before—and asked me over and over when Lord Geoffrey would ride back. Something in his voice made me suspicious and afraid. He snarled at me, ordered me to tell him. I sprang back, threatening to scream and rouse the guard. So Odo must coax me to watch for Lord Goeffrey. But I would not, unless he told me why.

"He said Sir Richard was weary of Lord Geoffrey, that the lad was in his way. Sir Richard wanted him made harmless. Odo told me that he was to ride out just before Lord Geoffrey and give the signal. Men would be in hiding, would drag him from his horse and carry him to a cloister. He swore—Odo did—that no harm would befall the young man."

"And you betrayed the man your master sheltered under his roof?"

"I—I love Odo," the girl gasped.

She was frightened worse than ever, but with a cold fear that would not let her escape from the dreadful voice.

Gislac stirred in his chair.

"Have this wench whipped," he commanded the man-at-arms, "and turn her out!"

"HE STILL holds out?"

"He sleeps, my father. His cheeks are not so pale. The physician says there is hope. I can not let him die!"

Gislac stroked his daughter's hair.

"You must rest, child; your own cheeks will be pale else. You must keep them bright for Geoffrey. To bed, now! You have not slept since—well, to bed! And send for Bermond."

When the officer came, he found Sir Giles deep in thought. He stood straight and silent till his master was ready to speak.

"You are captain of the wall, Bermond, till Gerard's thigh mends. Have up the great caldrons from the vaults, lay fires along the walls and store pitch and oil at every station. Have an eye to the armorer's chests. See to it that all rents in the supplies of mail are mended and have the spear-points and sword-blades fresh ground."

"It shall be done, my lord."

"Send out Jean Lefort with a dozen men for fresh supplies. Have an inventory made of all the beasts, all the last year's grain, the dried meat, the weapons on the estate; but have none brought into the castle till we get word that Monrepaire is ready to march.

"The peasants must have use of their food, and we must have room, till the moment comes to man the walls. Hold—order our tenants to appear at the castle for three hours each day, that they may know their stations and be trained for defense.

"Bid Raimond take the Spanish barb—there is no faster horse in the stables, or in the shire, for that matter—and have him watch the highroad to London.

"There will be fighting soon. The Rotten Reiver will say I slew Geoffrey. He does not know the boy still lives, nor do I wish him to know it. Forget that I have told you. He will scarce dare assault High Tower himself, though his riders are many and fierce. It will be more like him to lay complaint before the king. Stephen hates me already; this will give him an excuse to send an army against me."

"Aye, my lord."

Gislac smiled at the reply, more at the calm with which it was delivered.

"You would stand by me, Bermond, even against the king?"

"We will all stand by you, my lord. Kings come and kings go, but there is only one de Gislac!"

The knight sprang to his feet and clapped his man on the shoulder.

"Well said! The Rotten Reiver plays with loaded dice, Bermond—loaded against Geoffrey, loaded against me. I play fair, but I play to win. The stakes are our lives.

'Twill be a close game, for Stephen—if he moves at all—may move with half England behind him. God help us if it comes to a siege!"

"The walls are stout, Sir Giles."

"True, and so are our hearts; but there is ill fighting on an empty belly. A siege means starvation."

Bermond reflected. Then he said, simply and fervently:

"My lord, an empty belly is an ill thing. But fight we will, till there is not a belly left in High Tower!"

CHAPTER V

THOMAS THE CLERK

IN THE three days following Geoffrey lay much of the time unconscious, flushed with fever and delirium when he stirred at all. In spite of her father's urging, Margaret could not be kept from his bedside, where she shared vigils with old Martha and the physician. But there was no sign of Geoffrey's mending, unless it was a good sign that he lived at all.

Strong in her youth, Margaret lost nothing of her loveliness by the weary hours of watching. Yet there was little of her former self, of her joyous, laughing self that Gislac had loved so much. Her lips still smiled, but her wondrous eyes, clear to their bottomless depths, were filled with grave melancholy. She had learned the meaning of death and bereavement. Only her unshakable hope and high courage saved her from the bitterness of that knowledge.

Through those three days Gislac himself was troubled more than he cared to show. He felt like one who waits alone in the dark for an enemy he knows will strike, but whom he can neither see nor guard against.

The escaped foresters had of course reported their defeat to the Rotten Reiver; the Rotten Reiver always exacted vengeance. But how or when Richard would strike could only be conjectured.

One thing only was certain—he would prepare his revenge cunningly, with the cleverness and the malice of hell. He had powerful friends among the turbulent nobles, even among those who warred on the king; and yet the king himself was Richard's friend. Gislac had no friends but the poor and weak. He was isolated in the storm-center of hate and anarchy.

On the fourth day at the second hour of the afternoon Sir Giles heard the ringing notes of a silver horn, followed by a sharp challenge from the wall. His nerves quick with the impending sense of danger, he climbed to the battlements himself, too impatient to await Bermond's report.

At the foot of the hill nine mounted men climbed toward the arched gate of High Tower. Seven were full-armored and bore long lances. One, by his hooded robes and full, shaven face, was a priest; the ninth, who rode in advance with one of the spearmen, was tall, trimly bearded and dressed like a merchant. His horse was a splendid beast whose arching neck moved proudly.

Gislac turned to the warder by his side.

"Why did you challenge?" he demanded. "There is Raimond, with strange guests. Lower the bridge and raise the portcullis."

Bermond obeyed. His own eyes, sharp as they were, had not recognized young Raimond and the black Spanish barb in the drooping rider and weary beast beside the bearded merchant. The sweat and dust of three hot days' riding had caked them from head to feet in a crust of yellow.

While the bridge clanked down, Sir Giles descended in haste to prepare a welcome for his unknown guests. Few sought hospitality of High Tower in the evil days of King Stephen.

The great oak table was already spread when the guests came down from the chambers to which Gislac's steward had shown them, the dust of the road cleansed from face and hands and brushed from their garments. Their men-at-arms were welcomed by Gislac's own garrison; only the bearded man and the priest shared the hospitality of the hall.

Gislac awaited them, courteous and stately. The abundance of his welcome showed in the quantity and rich perfume of the wines his servants had brought from the cellars, in the smell of cooking that trickled in from the kitchens. As Sir Giles rose to greet his guests, Lady Margaret came in from the bower in a close-fitting robe of wine-colored velvet trimmed with silver, a chaplet of silver flowers in her hair.

The priest bowed low to Gislac and shyly to Margaret, averting his eyes as she spoke to him. But the tall man with the beard smiled gaily at both, and each smiled back, for the good cheer of the man was irresistible.

At close sight Gislac revised his judgment. Whatever this man might be, he was no merchant. There was no trace of servility about him, nor any of that pompous gravity with which the rich burghers invested themselves. Handsome in a trim, lean fashion, he had the indescribable poised alertness of a man of affairs, with all the grace of a gentleman. Dark, hawk-like, his face was at all times commanding, though it shifted with marvelous rapidity from grave dignity to mischief and from mischief to keenest intelligence. But through all his changes of feature and manner his eyes remained bright and friendly. Gislac liked him at first sight, for he read honesty in him and capability.

The priest was of lesser interest to both his hosts, yet he was no ordinary cloistered monk, for all his fear of women. His broad forehead and intelligent eyes showed mental force; his simple gravity was the unassuming worth of a good man.

"You have bad roads hereabouts," the tall man began. "Fortunately there is a brisk Norman welcome for the traveler in every castle."

"There is warm welcome here," Sir Giles smiled back at him. "I trust you will forgive me if I do not ask you to make my house your home; I am not at peace with my neighbors, and they might do you an injury."

The guest showed his large white teeth in a laugh.

"It is I who should make excuses," he returned. "My presence is not healthy in any man's house. I have as many foes as you, and as great ones, though I am but a poor clerk."

Gislac looked his astonishment.

"That you have enemies I can understand," he said frankly. "You have not the appearance of a rascal, and therefore you must be well hated in these evil times. But that you call yourself a clerk——"

"I do. I am Thomas Becket, citizen of London and clerk to his Eminence the Archbishop of Canterbury. I ride through this shire on my master's business. My business here concerns a message from him to you. This good priest with me is Brother Wilfred, monk of Peterborough."

"To me? But, I pray you, draw to the table. Villard, the Moorish wine. Sirs, I have poor fare to offer you, but your hunger will give you appetite. What message can Archbishop Theobald wish to send me, a petty castellan?"

While he spoke Gislac carved the roast with that precise dexterity of which Normen gentlemen were so proud and handed the deep plates to the steward, who passed them to the guests. Each man drew his knife, and plunging his fingers into the rich gravy, plucked out the choicest pieces. Holding these between finger and thumb of the left hand, each then cut up the pieces with his knife.

The wine having been poured into silver vessels, Margaret raised each in turn to her lips, tasted it and passed it on. For a little all ate in silence, while Gislac's falcons, roused by the smell of meat, fluttered down from their perches with shrill screams. His wolf-hound yawned, stretched and couched down beside his master's chair, ready to take the gobbets set aside for him.

BECKET took a napkin from the servant by his side, wiped his lips, drank and broached his errand.

"My lord the archbishop," he said slowly, choosing his words, "has been in disfavor with King Stephen since their quarrel over the succession. You know, I am sure, that the king would have forced his Eminence to proclaim Count Eustace heir to the throne."

Gislac nodded, and Thomas continued:

"The Pope's views on the succession were of the greatest weight. Without sanction from Rome the king dared not have his son proclaimed. He urged Archbishop Theobald to secure the Pope's assent, but this his Eminence would not do. Instead he sent me to Rome to obtain the apostolic approval of—Henry of Anjou!"

Gislac was startled, but he made no sign. His fine eyes watched his guest's face steadily. Thomas went on after a brief pause:

"Henry of Anjou, being grandson to the late King Henry and son to Henry's daughter Mathilda, is the rightful heir, Stephen no more than a usurper. Stephen's son Eustace, as all men know, is the worst rascal in the realm. The people would rebel rather than acknowledge him king after Stephen."

"I have heard it said," Sir Giles reflected, "that this young Count Henry is a masterful man, brave and honest."

"He is more than that. Like his grandsire he is a stern man, noble of soul, unshakably just. Once he is seated firmly on the English throne, the lawlessness and rapine that have torn his land so long will end; peace and justice will be restored. For that reason the archbishop will support him and is even now in communication with him. It is my task to journey up and down the Midlands, persuading all peaceful and upright men to enroll under Henry's banner.

"The king does not dare interfere with us openly. The power of the archbishop, always great, has recently been increased by the declaration of Winchester, in which all the higher ranks of the church avowed themselves openly his supporters.

"Thus England stands divided: Henry of Anjou has my master's aid and that of the clergy; the citizens have not declared themselves for fear of the barons, but they will do so as soon as Henry sets foot in England. The barons still stand aside, knowing that Henry's success would end their bloody tyranny, but despising Stephen too much to fight for him. We shall not know whom they will support until the issue is joined.

"Stephen, of course, has his Flemish mercenaries—bold men, trained in war and loyal to the hand that pays them. The division being so close, we must win the aid of every noble that has remained uncorrupted by the king's weakness and his own greed. Alas! Such men are all too few."

The priest, whose face had grown ruddier with the heady wine, crossed himself and sighed.

"Too few indeed!" he exclaimed. "God and His saints know what we have suffered, these eighteen Winters that Stephen has been king. The barons and the evil men have filled the land with castles, forcing the poor to labor for them with stone and mortar.

"When the castles have been built, the thieves who own them have filled them with devils and evil men. They have cast the innocent into their dungeons, hanged them up by the thumbs, made fires under them and smoked them with foul smoke. They have plundered churches and slain God's priests. They have swept through towns and villages, burning, murdering, ravishing, so that one might journey half a day without seeing a town inhabited, a church unscorched or crops standing. Blood, blood on all this land—torture and cruelty, so that the poor skulk in the woods, fearing to be seen, and honest men believe God and His saints asleep!"

"God and the saints sleep not, nor do they forget," Becket spoke solemnly. "But God works by the hand of man, so that it is time for true men to range themselves on His side. I have come to you, Sir Giles, with this word from Theobald of Canterbury:

> "You are known for a faithful subject and an upright man. You have endured hatred and wrong rather than ally yourself with those wicked nobles who torment our country. Now God and England have need of you. Look to it that you be on their side when Henry of Anjou, their champion and your rightful king, declares himself on English soil.

"Say now, Sir Giles, will you heed this message?"

Becket's eyes gleamed in his head like coals.

"More wine!" Sir Giles commanded; and when the cups had been filled he rose to his feet, the wine-cup raised in his hand.

Moved by the fierce compulsion in his features, the others followed his example—yes, even the strong man, Thomas Becket. Holding them all with his eyes, Gislac proclaimed:

"Long live Henry the Second, true King of England!"

Becket, Brother Wilfred, the Lady Margaret, all drained their glasses with him. repeating with eager enthusiasm:

"Long live Henry, true King of England!"

When they were seated, the priest, as if communing with himself, muttered:

"He will be like his grandsire, the first Henry. Ah, there was a king! Good man he was, and great was the fear of him. He made peace for men and beasts. Whoever bore his burden through the countryside, yea, though it was of gold or silver, no man durst say to him anything but good."

He smiled and looked suddenly at Margaret with his blue eyes, weak from poring over manuscripts.

Becket was smiling, too, but he turned grave as Sir Giles asked:

"When will the king land?"

"I know not. Within a few weeks certainly; perhaps tomorrow, perhaps not for a month. It must not be too soon, before we are ready to defend him. The archbishop hopes he will bring an army with him."

"Not too late, if I am to break a lance for him," Gislac replied. "Within the week the banners of my enemies may flaunt below my walls."

"God forbid!" Becket exclaimed. "Not Umfraville?"

"Richard de Monrepaire. Possibly Umfraville too, and de Born. They all hate me. The slightest occasion might bind them together against me. The occasion has come."

Rapidly he told the story of Geoffrey's proposal for Margaret's hand and the treacherous attack on the boy.

"He lies in my south chamber now," he went on, "near to death. I have seen to it that the Rotten Reiver thinks his murder successful. But my interference will bring down his vengeance. He is shrewd enough to guess that I know of his guilt. It is because I fear an assault that I warned you not to share my roof with me too long. Monrepaire is Stephen's man and would dearly love to lay hands on a servant of the archbishop's."

BECKET'S smile again illumined his face. "It is for like reason that I ride with a guard."

"A perilously small one," Gislac commented.

"Why yes. But they are stout lads and fight well. Already we have had some blows. I gave a few myself."

"I can believe it," Sir Giles laughed shortly.

"If the peril to High Tower is so great why do you not seek shelter elsewhere?" the clerk asked.

"Where should I seek it? No man in England would dare shelter de Gislac from his enemies."

"Go to France, to Normandy, and join King Henry there. It were a deadly sin to expose this maid to the perils of a siege —to say nothing of the lad Geoffrey, whom you would not wish to fall again into his uncle's hands."

Gislac frowned.

"That is just my trouble," he confessed. "The boy is too weak to be moved for some time to come. He would die. If I were alone, I should ask nothing better than to close my gates and defy all the fiends of hell to drag me out. But with my daughter and this wounded lad whom I love as a son, I would go if I could. I cannot, lest Geoffrey's wounds open. Now if the Reiver wins help from Umfraville or from King Stephen, I can hardly hope to hold out. Yet here I must make my stand, lest the boy, being moved, should die."

"A hard case," Becket observed. "I can only hope that Henry lands before your foes strike. Sir Richard will hunt cover once Stephen is overthrown. I knew something was in the wind, from the bearing of your man who rode hither with us. But he was too close-mouthed to tell us anything."

"He shall tell us forthwith," Gislac answered. "Villard, bid Raimond report to me at once."

In a few minutes Raimond returned. He looked from his master to the guests. But Gislac reassured him—

"Say on; these are friends."

"I watched the London road as you ordered, my lord," Raimond spoke. "A little after noon of the first day that accursed black-robed friar of Monrepaire's passed me on an ambling mule. His head was turned toward London. He recognized me and looked none too sweetly at me.

"I left the road then and lay for two days in the thicket atop of Lightwood Knoll, where I could see all toward the Flamwell without being seen. That same afternoon men-at-arms rode west toward Umfraville's castle, and others galloped north toward de Born. That was all, until these gentlemen came by this morning."

"You have done well," Gislac answered. "You may go."

Turning to Becket, he said:

"It is even worse than I thought. The Rotten Reiver is calling both Umfraville and de Born to join him, and the friar has doubtless been sent with a letter to Stephen. I shall have to face a royal army as well as the combined hosts of my old enemies."

"There will not be much to that royal army," Becket assured him. "Stephen knows something of our plans against him and will fear to detach too many men. What numbers can your enemies muster?"

"Umfraville has about three score, all well armed and mounted. De Born can raise perhaps as many more, or a little less. Sir Richard leads more than fifty spearmen —devils incarnate—and close to a hundred archers that he keeps in the Murkwood.

"I have three score and ten men-at-arms, but a dozen professional archers and a motley crowd of tenants who can shoot. They have been practising at their stations since my messenger summoned them, going to and from the castle to their homes and fields. When peril presses close, I shall call them in. But I can barely feed them; and I shall be far outnumbered in trained soldiers."

"God preserve you, then!" Becket answered fervently. "I will ride back at once and bring word of this to the archbishop. But I fear he can help little. Every penny he can scrape, every man he can raise is being saved to support our rightful king. Pray God Henry lands in time!"

CHAPTER VI

REBELLION

ALMOST a fortnight dragged by, each day drawing finer and more brittle the nerves of Gislac's garrison. The men-at-arms no longer joked one another at the turn of the watch; the grooms tended their beasts in morose silence. Old Martha went about shaking her gray head and muttering of disaster. The air was tense with foreboding.

Still Sir Richard, biding his time in Monrepaire, made no overt sign. No dust-clouds appeared along the road. The great plain between High Tower and the Murkwood lay green in the June sun, unkindled by the flash of arms. The long, anxious wait sapped at the strength of all within High Tower; all save Geoffrey, who knew nothing of the storm his supposed death had gathered, and Gislac, who was too old and shrewd a soldier to let his nerves master him. And his smiling calm, the steady ring of his deep voice kept the hearts of his men from too much fretting.

Margaret spent her days by Geoffrey's bedside, relieving Martha at sunrise. These weeks of self-forgetfulness, of the tender, anxious outpouring of her love, had wrought much change in her. All her great strength, her eager, flashing vitality seemed to spend itself on her lover. It was as if she were consciously flooding his wasted veins with her abundant vigor, giving him of her very life.

Under her care the fever left him. Though weak, each day saw him gain in strength. And as he gained, the girl grew gentler, softer, more absorbed. Her eyes no longer glowed and sparkled like untamed fire. They held a steady flame of love, soft and kind. Her vivid personality became subdued, but undepressed. She was living not for herself, not even for her own happiness, but to nurse back to life and vigor the flickering life of Geoffrey. And four days after Thomas the clerk had come and gone, the physician, looking kindly at the flushed face that hovered over the sick man, said—

"He will live."

Eight days later an old peasant, one of the Rotten Reiver's tenants, was brought before Sir Giles. Tall, bowed with labor but still sturdy and keen-eyed, he faced the stern Norman with the unfrightened dignity of his Saxon blood. He had been caught in the reeds that fringed the Sollett bank.

"What make you on my land?" Sir Giles asked, his voice deadly quiet.

The peasant's faded blue eyes twinkled.

"Waiting to be taken before you, my lord," he answered.

"What would you with me? Are you not the Rotten Reiver's man?"

"I was. I do not dare serve him longer. If any man saw me crossing the Murkwood——"

"Why cross it, then? I want no Monrepaire rascals."

The old Saxon's figure straightened proudly.

"Look you, my lord," he retorted. "I am an Englishman of ancient race, the grandson of Ordlac, who was son to Ordwine, alderman of this shire in the days of King Harold, before you Normans set foot on English soil. My fathers were mightier men than you — aye, and of better blood.

"But for our sins you Normans were sent against us, like the plagues of Egypt. You made us your serfs—even the highest of us must serve you. But affliction has purged our souls. The crimes of such men as Richard of Reiver's Roost have entered into our hearts and made men of us again.

"Now we live only for revenge upon our tyrants, only to repay the debt of blood and tears that has been mounting so long. We have cried to God, and God is ready to hear us. Against whom, think you, will we first turn the fire of our wrath? Against such men as the Rotten Reiver, who has drunk our tears, fattened on our toil, found his pleasure in our shame!"

"And you come to me, a Norman, for help?" Gislac interrupted.

"Not for help—*with* help. Two score men with bows, who know how to use them, to help man your walls."

"I can not accept your gallant offer," Gislac answered regretfully. "I have many tenants of my own, to whom, with their wives and children, I have promised shelter in case of siege. Forty more mouths to feed would be a weakness, not an added strength. Does Monrepaire make ready to move against me? My spies report him making preparations."

Godulf nodded.

"Last night I heard hammers ringing in the castle," he replied. "Many hammers, beating on iron. It is the sound that always goes before a fight—the mending of armor, the forging of blades. For the last fortnight we who till the fields of Monrepaire have endured blows and shame: our beasts seized and slaughtered before our eyes, our smoked meats and dried grains plundered by the Reiver's men-at-arms. Thus the Norman master always prepares for war—drawing his supplies from the toil of his tenants.

"As your spies have said, Monrepaire makes these preparations against you, whom he accuses of slaying his nephew. He has spread word of this all over his estates. Look to yourself, lord of Gislac! Not the Rotten Reiver alone, but de Born and Umfraville are gathering.

"If you lose, then we, whom our master has looted to feed his troops, will starve this Winter. Already the boldest of us have fled into the Murkwood, to gather acorns and hunt the deer. But if you beat back your foes, we will harry their retreat for you. If we do this, will you help us next Winter to find food?"

"Food you shall have, and silver with it," Gislac assured him. "Moreover, you shall not go away now without an earnest of your reward."

He fumbled in the leathern purse at his silver belt. But the peasant held up a warning hand.

"What, think you, would be my fate if the Reiver found me with silver in my pocket? I may be seen and stopped as I return. Give me nothing. It will be better for me. When you have slain my master, then I will take my own reward, in the joy of freedom."

* * *

NO SENTRY'S hail was needed to warn High Tower of its peril that afternoon. Every eye might see it, every ear hear it coming afar off. From out the shadow of the Murkwood a flashing river seemed to cascade suddenly, the sun rippling on its bright surface beautifully.

On and on it flowed, pouring into the plain, moving more slowly as it progressed, its head ever toward the Sollett and High Tower. From the walls the garrison watched it grow and glisten, till Bermond, trumpeting Gislac's order, sent each man to his post.

Then, while the master of High Tower watched that stream of steel roll toward him, sparks struck from a dozen flints ignited the fagots piled on the ramparts. Great caldrons, which had waited for days for just this need, were swung on iron cranes above the fires. A pungent stench rose in the Summer air, as the pitchy contents of the kettles felt the heat.

Laboring like giant ants, the men-at-arms wrestled with rocks heaped high behind the merlons, rolling them near the spaced battlements, poising them till the time should come to heave them down. Enormous shields of hide-covered planks were moved on rollers to the crenelons; behind these the scanty bowmen of High Tower waited, thrusting sheaves of four-foot arrows into their girdles, testing the strings of their seven-foot bows.

Now from a dozen places at once, scattered over the checkered plain, columns of smoke and yellow tongues of fire rose straight up in the windless air. Gislac's eyes hardened as he watched; the river of hostile steel had separated into four columns, each advancing slowly, firing the huts of his tenants as they moved along.

Glad was Gislac then that, acting on the old peasant's news, he had called in all his serfs from their fields with their beasts, their last year's dried produce and their stored-up mead. They would lose little beside their huts of wattle-and-daub. Yet these, however easily replaced, were home to each of the unhappy Saxons who had built them.

Then, while the four menacing columns crawled nearer, Gislac ordered up to the walls those homeless tenants of his. They came in their rags, their faces grim and sullen, their yellow locks matted and unkempt. Yet, as they reached the top of the winding stair and came out on the battlements, their eyes lighted a little, for they loved their own kind master as much as Saxon could love Norman. Aye, they loved him. Here and there in England just masters and grateful tenants were even now fusing into one people—not Saxon, not Norman, but English. But for the evil reign of Stephen, but for the cruel tyranny of most Norman barons, the old hate would have been quite forgotten.

Gislac ordered his peasants to the wall and pointed out the scene that lay beyond. They clustered about the merlons, two score of men, with their comely wives and sturdy children; and at the sight of their burning homes they raised a bitter cry. Sir Giles watched them for a moment, while something burned in his heart. Then, passing behind them as they gazed and cursed, he touched one on the shoulder, a big-brawned man of close on forty, taller even than Gislac's self.

"You have all brought your bows I see, Witta. But I hoped you had more arrows than this—scarce ten apiece."

"Steel heads make deep wounds in a poor man's pouch, my lord. But he who has few shafts misses few shots. There is not one of us here who has not made him a bow in his boyhood out of your ash saplings and stolen into the Murkwood to kill the Rotten Reiver's deer. Have we not shot as straight and hard as your Normans whenever it pleased you to set up the targets and test our skill?"

"Aye," said Gislac. "And my armory is well stored. You shall not lack for shafts."

"Nor shall we waste them, though each of us must shoot like two men to square the account," declared Witta.

The other tenants spoke emphatic approval, while their women and children echoed their cries.

"Hark to me, lads," Witta addressed them. "You see those flames that feed on our houses? But for our lord's gentleness, our dear one's bodies would even now feed those flames! How many barons are there in this land who would do what ours has done? In the face of a siege he has turned away forty stout archers, as Godulf himself has told us, to give our own womenfolk and younglings the same safety as himself.

"Do ye know that every mouthful they eat, every sup they drink cuts deep into his supply? That what he feeds our own he has denied to fighting men who would have nigh doubled the muster of his bows? What will ye do to earn the food so dearly bought?"

"Shoot doubly straight!" they cried. "Feather every shaft in a foeman's heart! Give us arrows and we will speed them aright!"

Gislac pointed to the chests ranged along the walls.

"Fill your quivers!" he said and smiled. "Now send your women down to the court, where they will be safe."

So de Gislac manned his walls.

THEIR cruel work well begun, the four hostile columns moved more swiftly. They were distinct now. The sun-kissed helmets jogged along above the rising and falling heads of splendid horses; spear-points twinkled at the slant; the banners and surcoats of many men-at-arms splashed the plain with brilliant color. Here in the van was the standard of Monrepaire, a sable tower on a silver field.

A little rearward and to the right the blue boar of Umfraville ramped on a scarlet field; to the left the brown bull of de Born. In the rear, covering Sir Richard's hundred green-coated archers, rode a score of big fair-haired men in flashing mail and blue surcoats; above them a great scarlet banner disclosed two passant leopards in gold. Suddenly, as at a signal, all but the bowmen and the blue-coated soldiers in the rear spurred swiftly forward and splashed into Sollett ford, the water dashing upward in a million sun-silvered splotches. The rear guard, safe behind the main host, slowly followed through the roiled water.

Once across the stream, the columns separated yet more widely and approached High Tower from four different angles. The watchers on the wall well knew what was before them. Their enemies would surround them so that not a man or mouse could escape and hold them there till they starved or yielded.

His eyes watching the advance, Gislac divided his own archers into two divisions, assigning to each a stiffening of five of his ten Norman bowmen. Over one he placed as captain the Saxon Witta; over the other, one of the Normans.

"And now, keep back from the battlements and hold your flight," he ordered.

"Are we not to loose at them when they come within range?" Witta grumbled.

"Their bows outnumber yours three to one," the old soldier pointed out. "They would drive you from the walls. The Rotten Reiver thinks I have but a dozen archers; I shall save you Saxons for a surprize. Fear not. You shall have your turn."

Now the oncoming horsemen halted, waiting for the rear guard to come up. They formed, when deployed in open order, a continuous ring about the castle, just out of bowshot—a ring of bristling points and massive, shining figures on horseback.

"Three hundred at the least," Sir Giles muttered. "Those fellows with the bowmen will be Stephen's Flemings."

Then, his great voice swelling like a trumpet, he bade his men look down.

"There be King Stephen's men!" he shouted. "Look well, my lads, for they are the might of England. So soon as the first weapon from these walls touches a hair of them, we be outlaws and rebels!"

Far back against the surface of the plain a fresh procession appeared—a number of two-wheeled carts drawn by scrubby ponies, high-laden, accompanied by a dozen troopers and many plodding figures that did not gleam in the sunlight. They were the supply-wagons and the laborers of the besieging host.

And now, as these approached, a single figure rode a few steps forward on a high-mettled horse that pranced and caracoled. The rider's mail was bright and fine-woven; his kite-shaped shield flung back the light blindingly from its polished surface. He waved one hand, and a trumpet blew a parley.

At Gislac's command a second trumpet sounded from the walls, signaling that the parley was granted. The rider spurred well forward, till all on High Tower recognized Richard de Monrepaire.

A moment he stared haughtily at the stout walls before him. Then a second horseman joined him from the ranks behind. At Sir Richard's command this man blew out his great chest and announced so that all could hear:

"To the outlaw, murderer and traitor, Giles de Gislac: In the king's name, I, Richard de Monrepaire, Knight and Baron, Earl of Ashton and Donnet, command you to lay down your arms, yield your castle and submit you to the earl's mercy. In default thereof, I, Richard, declare you and yours false and forfeit to me, your overlord, and to the king!"

Sir Giles looked down from the battlements, a mocking smile on his face.

"Earl, is it?" he gibed. "So Stephen has made an earl of you, Rotten Reiver? So I am your vassal? Go to, Earl of Reiver's Roost, go to! There is blood on your hands, the blood of your brother's son. If you are not out of arrow-flight speedily, there will be blood on your face!"

Sir Richard's face was expressionless, fixed as a mask.

"Is this the answer I must bring the king?" he asked.

"It is the answer you must bring your conscience. I will answer the king for myself. Now go! Draw, Witta!"

The tall Saxon gave a cry of joy and fitted an arrow to the string. But before he could bend the bow, Sir Richard and his herald were in full flight.

Young Raimond, he who had ridden out to spy on Sir Richard's movements, came up beside his lord.

"The black friar rode to some purpose," he hazarded. "Here are the fruits of his errands: an earldom for a rascal and outlawry for honest men. But for the sanctity of his priesthood I would have slit his throat. Would to God I had done so!"

"No good comes of slaying priests," Sir Giles retorted. "Leave that to men like the Reiver. See there! Their bowmen draw together. Now we shall have trouble enough!"

The archers of Monrepaire were indeed drawing together. Marshaled in ranks three deep, they unslung their bows, nocked the strings and drew each man several arrows from his belt. Then, at the word of command they advanced six paces toward the wall of High Tower, halted and drove a cloud of arrows straight at the battlements. The shafts all fell short, but the bowmen were again advancing.

"Down, all!" Sir Giles bellowed. "Down, I say, Witta! Not a shaft in reply! Cover up!"

The entire garrison sought cover, ducking behind the stone merlons and the great plank pavisses or sheltering their heads with their shields. Now the second arrow-flight came from the hostile bowmen, who aimed high in air, that their shafts might overcome the height of the wall. This time half the flight pattered down on the stone ramparts, but Gislac's men were too well protected for hurt.

Gislac peeped out through a slit in one of the pavisses. Under cover of their arrows the horsemen had drawn within range. Behind them the provision-carts rolled up creaking; Monrepaire's unhappy peasants, goaded on by the spear-points of their masters, snatched down shovels and mattocks and commenced to dig.

"They make trenches," Gislac commented. "Soon they will be safe and snug behind a rampart of earth and stone. Ah, if I had more bowmen!"

The men-at-arms on the wall chafed at their own inaction. They could not understand why their lord, fierce old war-dog that he was, should hold them in leash when their enemies were within reach of their arrows. Their very souls were galled at the sight—snatched in stolen glances between warding off arrows—of hostile horsemen within reach and unhurt.

* * *

NOW the thicker flight and heavier weight with which the arrows fell told the defenders that the Reiver's bowmen were close in. The ring of spade on stone, the multitudinous grunt of toiling peasants, the jeers and cries of the troops below rose and swelled in a chorus of menace all about High Tower.

As swiftly as caution would allow, de Gislac made the circuit of the walls, ducking behind each merlon as he reached it. Everywhere he shot low, sharp sentences toward his men. At every other step he snatched a quick glance at the scene below. The besiegers were already half-sheltered by the deepening trenches and rising mounds of earth. Their horses were being led back of the lines and turned out to graze; fresh arrows were being relayed to the bowmen, food and drink were being passed along the lines of men-at-arms, who paused between bites to jeer.

"Holed up like a fox," Gislac thought ruefully. "Pray God Henry of Anjou comes soon! I like not to be hanged for a rebel with the true king near enough to sing masses over my grave. Ha! Bermond! The moat!"

CHAPTER VII

THE SNARED EAGLE

"THERE is nothing to fear—yet—" Gislac told his daughter, as they sat late at the evening meal. "Two or three vain assaults, ill-planned and badly carried out; then they will have a bellyful. Not till they grow weary of fighting and sit quietly in their earthworks need we fret ourselves. Then we may indeed fear."

"How do you know they will so waste their strength?" Margaret asked. "They have numbers, and time fights on their side. Knowing this, will they not rest content with starving us out?"

Gislac laughed shortly.

"That is not the Norman way. We have marvelous persistence, we Normans; but we are hot-headed also. Is it not written that the Conqueror himself at Hastings threw away countless good knights against the unshakable Saxon shield-wall before he thought to destroy the wall by cunning?

"Moreover, three heads, not one, prevail in their camp. It was the Rotten Reiver's plan, take my word for it, to dig their trenches within our range, covered by their archers. It worked so well that they got within our guard without loss. But de Born and Umfraville will be the more jealous of him for his success.

"Those three belong to the most jealous brotherhood on earth—the order of thieves. Why, think you Umfraville and de Born joined this expedition merely out of hate of me? No; rather because they hoped to steal the fruits of it from under the Reiver's nose. His cunning and their strength they rely on to crush me. But if High Tower should fall, de Born and Umfraville would straightway join forces against the Reiver, take it from him, and then turn against each other. Fearing, therefore, lest his cunning rather than their strength should beat me, and he then contrive to outwit them, it is their hope to win by main force. That being so, they will attack soon and hard, trusting to break their way into the tower, destroy us and then hold the walls against the Reiver.

"But the Reiver is too shrewd for them. He knows that not all their force is enough to smash these stout walls. He will let them shatter their strength against it till they are too weak to defy him and will then use them as he pleases. His scheme—for he has brains—will be to starve us out without the loss of his stout men-at-arms."

"But the king's men," the girl interposed, "would not they take the part of Monrepaire against the other two? He commands with the king's commission."

"Stephen's men? They will follow the example of their master—wait to see whether Richard or the other two have the upper hand and then join the stronger. But Geoffrey is still unaware of his uncle's part in this?"

"Of course," answered Margaret with a hint of reproach in her voice. "No one is allowed to speak of it within his hearing. He heard the tumult of their approach and the cries from the battlements and asked what it was. I could not tell him we were in no peril—he knows the sounds of battle—but I told him only that de Born and Umfraville were attacking."

"What did he say?"

"He asked me: 'Why do you not send for aid to my uncle? He will be glad to help you, now that we are betrothed.' So I said—wisely, I hope, though I had scarce time for thought—'Sir Richard has already heard, and is here; but the doctor will not let you see him. The king also has sent troops.'

"He seemed content and answered: 'Ah, now all will be well, since my uncle has brought you aid. He has a shrewd brain. He will be worth many men.'

"Geoffrey is still so weak that he can be easily managed. My poor boy! How he loves his terrible uncle!"

Her black eyes dimmed with tears.

Even as she spoke, there came a tremendous clangor at the postern, a little gate deep-sunk in the eastern wall, guarded by two salient battlemented galleries. Following the clang, there was a great thumping noise and the cries of the garrison on the wall. Gislac leaped up from his long finished meal, hurried back into his armor, which he had flung aside on a bench against the wall and, his fingers still fumbling with the clasps, ran to the battlements, while Margaret sped like a deer back to Geoffrey's bedside.

The fires on the wall, glowing to keep the pitch-kettles hot, made the wall appear a very inferno, through which men-at-arms scurried to and fro with their weapons like devils scuttling about hell with pitchforks. Below, whence the thumping clamor came, the darkness hid the nature of the attack. But the sounds told clearly what was going on.

"That tree-trunk came from the Murkwood," Gislac muttered. "Light the pitch-balls," he shouted, "before they smash the timbers of the gate!"

He was not greatly afraid, for the postern, stout in itself, was barricaded with beams and boulders. But once its timbers started, it would be a weak joint in the armor of defense. At his command, pitch-balls—great globes of pitch and flax—were thrust into the fires till they burst into brilliant blaze and flung down over the wall. Wherever they struck, they cast a glare that threw all about them into bright relief.

Instantly the movements below were revealed. In the light of the pitch-balls the defenders saw a score of figures running up with a huge stripped trunk, preparing to crash it against the postern with all the force of their onrush, as they had already done several times.

Behind them, tailing off from dimmer light into darkness, many men in armor waited in a throng. Their weapons were ready, their faces fierce with the lust of battle. As soon as the gate should crash, they would pour into the breach, their swords hungry for the blood of those within.

"Now!" Gislac shouted, as the second relay of pitch-balls brought this throng of warriors into clearer sight. "Bows and javelins!"

His men-at-arms crowded the battlements, those nearest the merlons hurling down heavy spears, weighted at the point, shooting arrows into the press of those below, launching iron-tipped stakes. Cries of dismay rose from the would-be assailants. Galled by the sudden flight of weapons, eager for hand-grips, they rushed madly in, closing about the postern in a dense mass.

A mighty man with dark-plumed helmet led them on, swinging high a great ax. In a moment its blows rang against the iron-studded woodwork of the gate. At sight of his momentarily upturned face against the glare Gislac laughed and shouted down:

"Mad, mad, Umfraville! You shall sleep in hell tonight!"

And he hurled a javelin straight down at the astounded face of his enemy. But the light, reflected back from the stone surface of the wall, deceived his aim. The spear struck the outjutting cornice of the left-hand gallery, rebounded and buried itself in the neck of one of Umfraville's soldiers.

Straightening, Gislac cried out an order.

TRUMBLING over the pavement of the wall, great boulders were rolled to the battlements and prized over with crowbars, falling with a swish and a roar. Full in the midst of the press below they crashed, and shrieks and groans gave answer.

The assailants pressed back, panic-stricken, from the death they could not fight. As they fled, the thirsty spears and arrows of the garrison drove in among them, piercing mail and flesh, till they scattered in the dark.

"That will satisfy the boar!" Gislac mocked. "Now for the bull!"

The bull, however, was content to wait for a while. All was quiet the next day. The garrison on the walls and the host in the trenches below glared or gibed at each other, but neither loosed a shaft. The besieged had ample shelter behind their battlements and knew better than to provoke the heavier arrow-flight of those below.

"Pray God de Born be not frightened at Umfraville's ill-luck!" de Gislac prayed.

But de Born had something in store, as Sir Giles observed, for before the northern face of the tower, where de Born's brown bull floated in the breeze, there was much stir and bustle. The trenches lay at the very foot of the slope. Behind them in the level land carpenters were doing strange things to the empty provision-carts. These were being taken apart, reassembled on lower bodies, strengthened with beams and roofed with heavy reenforced planks. Butchers were busily skinning cattle and stretching the green hides. A log like the trunk so ill-used by Umfraville was being sawn in two by shifts of men laboring mightily with a crude two-handled saw.

The sight of these preparations wrung a wry smile from Sir Giles.

"Well enough, well enough," he commented to Joseph the spearman, "but I have a blunt answer ready."

All night Gislac paced the battlements, waiting for de Born's assault. All night the fires burned high on the tower, the men-at-arms roasting joints of mutton in the flames and gnawing at the meat between fitful bursts of activity. Fitful only in appearance, however, for every man in Gislac's garrison had his appointed task, his appointed moment for its performance, no matter what the circumstance.

Watch succeeded watch; one man relieved another; but always at the proper time, with intervals snatched for food, for the moderate taking of wine, for game and jest about the fires.

The Saxon bowmen stood watch like the Normans, but at stations specially assigned to them. They ate together and drank their honey-mead, but had no dealings more than necessary with the men-at-arms. Sir Giles wisely respected their aloofness, knowing how much less love existed between serf and Norman soldier than between serf and lord.

At length, just as the first flush of pink mingled with the gray of dawn, de Born's camp quickened into life—slowly at first, a horse neighing here and there, a few spearmen rubbing the sleep from their eyes, a snatch of drowsy song. Then the garrison caught the slow creak of ungreased wheels, the clatter of scabbards against mail. The men of High Tower were instantly at their stations, weapons in hand, the piles of stones and darts freshly renewed.

"The Brown Bull has more wit than I thought," Gislac said to his captain, Bermond. "His scheme is a good one, though not so good against me. See! He has persuaded Monrepaire to lend him a score of archers. They move! Run you now, Bermond, and prepare the tubes!"

Bermond shot a quick glance at his master.

"Tubes, said you? Ha! ha! ha! The calves of the Brown Bull will be veal this morn!"

He was off like the wind, shouting orders to his men-at-arms. A great scurrying about followed his commands. Bulky objects wrapped in hides were lugged forth, set out behind the merlons and built solidly in place with heaps of stones.

The sunlight was yellow on the plain when de Born advanced, and a strange advance it was. Covered by a line of archers, a dozen of the roofed carts prepared the day before moved ponderously up the hill toward High Tower, pushed by sweating soldiers. The stretched bulls' hides had been nailed over the planking everywhere and fell in curtains over the otherwise open fronts of the wains.

From two of the wagons long segments of tree-trunk projected like battering-rams, which indeed they were. The men who pushed these strange engines forward were well protected by the carts themselves and by the slant of the hill.

Nevertheless, the archers to the rear kept up a steady stream of arrows, which pattered just inside the parapet, forcing the garrison to keep well back, where they could not see to hurl down javelins.

Sir Giles gazed down through the slit in his wooden pavis.

"Well schemed!" he cried in admiration. "Ho, Raimond! Were you afraid last night? Did it irk you to wait all through the dark hours?"

"Not I, my lord," the young officer answered stoutly. "We ate and drank."

"Even so. De Born postponed his assault that we might be tortured by the fear of that which came not. He sought to wear down our nerves. Therefore I gave orders that ye eat between watches. And lo your nerves troubled you not! Tubes, there!"

The protected carts were now close to the wall, the two with battering-rams being placed in the center. Through the hangings in front of a third a spear-point thrust glinting in the sun.

"As I thought."

Gislac narrowed his eyes at the advance.

"When you two have made a breach, the rest will vomit forth their spawn like bees to force an entry for the host. Aim me a tube at the ram yonder, Bermond—the one with the trunk that swings. Touch her where trunk meets curtain."

The cart at which he pointed was just coming into action, its long ram swinging about through an orifice in the hide curtain. At first apparently aimless, its movement soon became fixed. Many hands in the screened body of the cart urged it forward. With mighty force it struck full against a single stone in one of the lower courses of the wall. There was a shower of rock-dust, for the trunk was shod with iron.

Once more the trunk slid back, swung and balanced for its second stroke. Of a sudden a sheet of flame spat from the battlements, seeming to flare out wider and wider as it shot toward the cart. Then with a crackling roar it flung itself about the inward end of the trunk, about the curtain of hides, about the very roof of the wagon.

Some one laughed within the cart, laughed at the futility of attempting to burn wood that was wrapped in green hides. Against this very thing had de Born prepared those hides. But the laugh died even as it was born. From within the cart came quick gasps from throats that choked for breath, came cries of fierce pain as the flames ate in through green hides, through boards, through mail that scorched the flesh as it heated.

Grimly Bermond drew back from the crenelations one of the strange objects he had placed there and shot another into its place. They were long tubes of copper, about four inches each in bore, tapering from butt to muzzle. Applying a match of tarred flax to the open butt and instantly closing it with a copper plug, he pointed the muzzle toward the second battering-ram, while his helpers directed a third and a fourth tube against other carts.

From each tube flashed a sheet of fire like that which had sprung from the first, puffing out into a pear-shaped mass of flame as it reached the outer air, soaring straight down upon the doomed wagons. As they felt its hot touch, the wagons burst into fierce conflagration. Shrieks of pain and horror issued from them. The blazing curtains bellied and parted before the blows of desperately wielded blades. Their mail glowing red-hot, their garments aflame, the luckless soldiers concealed within leaped from the carts.

As they fell, they were riddled with darts and arrows from the wall, for the archers who should have supported the attack, sick with horror and aghast with the fear of witchcraft, had flung down their bows and fled to the rear. In a few moments after the first blast of fire the carts were empty—save for those who had not managed to disentangle themselves from the heavy green hides—and blazing in every plank and rib. A throng of frightened, tortured men pelted back upon the hill, the missiles of High Tower pursuing and striking them down as they ran. After five minutes the attack had died in agony.

"What are those devil-tubes, my lord, and where learned you of their magic?" young Raimond asked.

Having but recently attached himself to Gislac's service, he had never seen them before. His face was somewhat white as he asked the question.

Gislac himself had become drawn about the lips.

"They are evil things," he answered, "not proper to be used save in great peril. There can scarce be another man in England who knows their use, nor do I mean to give instruction. Therefore I shall not tell you how I have compounded the elements that make that fierce flame nor the means by which it is driven from the tubes, save that the gases given off by its ingredients explode it forth. It is called 'Greek Fire,' and I learned of it in Sicily, when I served King Robert there.

"A wizened Greek admiral, one Heraclides, brought the secret from Constantinople. Before he perished, he confided it to an Arab, who told it to me. It is hell's own brew, but there is no magic in it. It is a pity to destroy good men in such a way; yet had we not used it, we should have suffered a breach, and yonder rascals would have put us to the sword.

"No ordinary fire will burn through green hide nor could we man the walls sufficiently in the face of their archery to smash the carts with stones. Well, they have had their fill. It will soon be our turn."

"Then shall we strike?" Bermond asked eagerly.

"Aye, tonight. They will not expect a sortie so soon. It is not held wise for besieged men to sally forth against odds until hunger forces them; wherefore the Rotten Reiver will not expect attack. So I shall show the greater wisdom by an act of seeming folly."

"But—why attack Sir Richard's force?" Bermond questioned, a puzzled frown crinkling his forehead. "We have shaken Umfraville; we have shaken de Born. Would it not be well to follow up our advantage against them rather than charge the unweakened camp of the Reiver?"

"An attack against the Reiver is the last thing they dream of, therefore we attack the Reiver. Also the Reiver has now a credit among his allies which we must shake. Look you, both his fellows have launched against us blows that have failed and cost them dear. Weaker in men, they are weaker yet in influence. If Sir Richard has the prestige of saving his men, while the others imperil theirs, the whole host will demand him for their leader.

"Then his councils will prevail, and that will be bad for us. He will persuade them to sit quietly and starve us out. Against starvation we have no weapon, save the hope that Henry of Anjou comes speedily."

Bermond nodded humble acquiescence.

"With a wise lord," he said, "even fools may win the day."

* * *

SUPPORTED by soft cushions, Geoffrey sat upright for the first time since his happy ride to High Tower. His cheeks were still pale and thin; his blue eyes seemed unnaturally large, and the muscles of his bare forearms seemed greatly wasted. But his wounds were closed, though not fully healed. Time would bring him strength again.

"Ah, that I could wield a sword!" he cried. "That I had my strength! No woman is weaker than I, no human more void of glory. Never have I struck a blow in anger; and now, when every sword is precious, every idle mouth a menace, I lie here helpless, a burden to you whom I love."

Margaret met his impatience with her old, gay smile. Her love had been brought back from the very jaws of death, and neither swords without nor the diminishing supply of food within could dim her spirit.

"Fret thyself not, sweetheart; there is no danger," she lied cheerfully.

Geoffrey's mood responded readily to hers.

"True," he admitted, "the peril can not be great, with my uncle to help you. Yet I would I could do my man's part! But surely my uncle can see me now. He loves me dearly. Will you not ask him to come?"

Her slender fingers softly ruffled his yellow hair. She bent over and kissed him.

"He can not come, oh foolish one!" she crooned tenderly. "The siege is close. Umfraville and de Born press us hard. His constant presence among the men is all that keeps the issue balanced."

As this lie of mercy left her lips, she turned away, unable to meet Geoffrey's eyes.

"Your man's part now, my dear," she went on, touching her lips to his hair, "is to be patient and of good cheer, which is better medicine than all the good physician has in his chest."

"But he will come when the danger is less?" the boy urged. "I am weary to see him."

"Ah, I see," said Margaret, placing herself before him, a mischievous taunt in her eyes. "You are weary of me!"

But seeing the hurt look come into his face, she hastened to him and kissed him again, saying:

"Ah, forgive me! I meant nothing—nothing. You must love me dearly, Geoffrey, and be well soon. Your uncle shall come as soon as he can be spared. Come, it is time for your draft."

"How can I do otherwise than get well with such thoughtful love and care for me filling every moment? If I could only fight for you!"

"Strength first, my boy, and then the fight," said the voice of Sir Giles from the doorway.

He entered the room, continuing:

"If you hear tumult tonight, have no fear for us. We make a sortie. It is well planned and can not fail. For the first time since the siege began, I have displayed my banner on the wall. Last night's victory gave me enough warrant for it. The eagle on the tower, *or*, in a field *azure*—'tis a famous device! The eagle is snared for the moment, but she plucks at the snare, boy. Her beak and talons can still rip. I shall have good news for you tomorrow."

Geoffrey's face and Margaret's glowed in response to his words, albeit Geoffrey's soon sobered.

"Is Father Ambrose here?" he asked at length. "Since my uncle is too occupied to see me, I would fain talk with the priest. His holy teaching would comfort me."

Gislac's lips twisted under the black beard, which sufficiently concealed their agitation.

"He is not here," he answered the boy. "But I will prepare a chamber for him, in case he should appear. The siege is tight without, you know, and it is as hard to get in as to get out."

As Sir Giles left the room, he was thinking in his heart—

"Let me lay hands on that black-frocked priest of Belial and I will prepare a chamber for him that will make him long for a bed in hell!"

CHAPTER VIII

UMFRAVILLE'S TERMS

WITTA the Saxon clung to his master's arm, an agony of appeal in his voice.

"Let us go, let us go, my lord!" he begged. "We have not struck a blow, have scarce loosed a shaft. Would you rob us of all the glory?"

"Obey me and you shall have your share tonight," Gislac promised. "You together with the other bowmen shall man the galleries above the postern. Hark now!"

He whispered a few crisp sentences into Witta's ear and repeated the instructions to the Norman archer in charge of the second division.

"Ready, Thomas. You and Gerard stand guard at the gate. His thigh is well enough for that now, though I would not risk him yet at quick work in the open. Keep well back in the shadow and be prompt to close the gate. Understood? Ready, all!"

The rocks and timbers having been cleared aside in the afternoon, the postern was softly opened. Its well-greased hinges made no sound. The keep was as black as the moonless night outside. Quietly, their feet wrapped in felt casings over the mail, fifty men-at-arms stole out after de Gislac's broad back.

Though the fires on the wall had been suffered to dwindle till no single ray reached the ground, the men wore short cloaks and hose of dark cloth over their armor, lest the gleam of the metal rings betray them. Their only weapons were swords, knives or axes. They bore no spears to trip them up in the dark.

When the low *tap-tap* of Gerard's dagger-hilt against the casing told him all had passed the gate, Gislac clucked softly with his tongue. His men gathered together as well as they could in the dark, and Sir Giles gave them their last instructions in a vibrant whisper:

"Around the wall—so. Yonder are his fires. Wander not from the true southwest and keep as close as ye may. Let not your anger carry you too far. We plan to lame the Reiver, not destroy him. At my signal back for your lives! If ye tarry, ye must be outnumbered. On them now, for the Eagle of Gislac!"

ALREADY quivering with eagerness, the men sped toward the campfires of de Monrepaire as fast as their feet would carry them. Knowing every inch of the ground, they were repeating in deadly earnest a maneuver they had often practised in time of peace. Already they could see the drowsy sentinels on guard by the trenches, the fires gleaming red on their armor.

Dark-clad as they were, the men of Gislac were on the startled sentinels before a voice could cry in challenge. They seemed to rise up like specters of the night, unseen till they loomed in the very glow of the fires. To right and left they hurled themselves, following the trench, striking down swiftly and silently at all that lay or stirred behind the earthwork.

Now they could see, nor cared whether they were seen or not. Sir Richard's soldiers were taken at a pitiless disadvantage. So secure had they thought themselves that nearly all, save the sentries, had been asleep. They woke to the clang of sword on mail; many never woke at all in this world.

Slumped down on the ground, lying prone or tangled in their own weapons, they were hard put to it to face the hacking, tearing furies that leaped down upon them out of the fire-shot gloom. Those who could scramble to their feet fought desperately, crying out for help, their cries half-drowned by the yells of pain all about them. The sleep still weighting their eyelids, they struck out blindly, as often as not cutting down their own fellows. It was hot, sharp work, with deadly, intelligent fury on one side, panic and confused terror on the other.

In the midst of the turmoil a whistle blew shrilly. Instantly every assailant leaped for the parapet, scrambled out of the trench and disappeared in the night. A trumpet shrilled to the north, a second to the east. All through the startled encampment rang the shouts of wakened men and the clang of hastily seized arms. Horses neighed shrilly; trampling feet ran hither and thither. The night echoed with noise. Men's ears were stunned, but their eyes saw nothing.

Unfamiliar with the steep and stony ground, slow with sleep, the pursuit began aimlessly, yet with fierce intensity, to stumble up the slope. Fresh fuel was heaped on the camp-fires. As the light grew, the hill at least became clear. A hundred horses were driven toward the dim fires of High Tower, galloping from every arc of the besieging circle. But the farthest flicker of the flames could not reach the lofty wall.

Gerard and Thomas, on guard at the postern gate, heard three whistled notes, each higher than the one before. Stepping aside, each shifted his grip on his weapon, each with his left hand on a leaf of the ponderous door. Then with the suddenness of lightning the darkness became flaming day. At their master's signal the score of men-at-arms left on the battlement had flung down lighted pitch-balls, heaving them as far in the direction of Sir Richard's camp as they could throw. In that swift change from dark to light the two guards at the gate saw a line of running men in dark garments speeding toward them in full career, each bearing a dripping weapon. Behind them, just topping the rise of the hill, the heads of a dozen horses leaped into the glare, gleaming figures in flashing mail bending forward in the saddles and brandishing their swords.

Then, as the pursuit stood revealed by the pitch-flares, a sound like the sudden hum of a thousand bees shot through the air. The galloping horses reared violently, pitched and fell sprawling, pierced with many arrows. But even as they reared, their riders flung both arms wide and slid from the saddle.

Fresh riders came up behind, pouring on and on, their numbers seeming endless in the night. But as fast as they reached that sprawling, kicking heap of wounded horses, they piled up fearfully upon it. He who was not pitched over his charger's head or pinned beneath its weight went down with an arrow through breast or throat.

Meantime they who had made the sally rushed back at full speed through the open gate between the ready guardsmen. One at a time they came, never more than two abreast, for they knew the peril of jamming the entrance. Last of all came Gislac, his face to the pursuit, his great red sword in his hand.

Even as he reached the sheltering portal, a single horseman leaped the mass of mangled men and horses on the crest and bounded straight for the gate. An arrow clanged against his helmet, another struck in his horse's withers; yet on he swept, his sword flashing about his head. As he towered above Sir Giles, a stone hurled from the tower smashed in the horse's skull. But the rider leaped free.

Gislac, his back to the entrance, waited for his foe to regain his balance. He had not to wait long. The man gathered himself like a cat and sprang in. His point whistled past Gislac's face.

The fight that followed was such as no

man sees twice in this life. The two champions lashed at each other with a fury that seemed born of mortal hate. The steady clashing of their swords sounded like the beating of a dozen hammers on as many anvils. Gislac was head and shoulders bigger than his opponent, heavier, stronger; but he had neither such lightning speed nor so much reserve.

The other man had ridden to the gate; Gislac had just arrived after a breath-racking run following a desperate battle. Thomas and Gerard would have come to their lord's aid, had not his broad back, shifting rapidly from right to left, as he thrust, parried and lunged, blocked the narrow gateway.

From the rim of the slope came the angry cries of the besieging cavalry, unleashed at last, but no more able to close in on High Tower than they had been in the days before, for now their archers were not with them. The fires on the tower had died almost away, so that Monrepaire's archers could not see to loose a shaft.

Meantime Witta and his Saxons, striving to outrival their Norman fellow bowmen, kept up an unceasing hail of arrows. The pitch-balls, constantly renewed from the battlements gave them perfect shooting-light. Not a horse, not a man-at-arms could break through the storm of their shafts to rescue the lone champion of the besiegers.

His breath coming short, de Gislac felt his adversary press in upon him with renewed ferocity. Never had he measured swords with such a master; never had he felt less confidence in his own swift strength. The long blades crossed and flickered so rapidly that he had not yet had time to scrutinize his enemy's face. He had only the impression of blazing eyes and snarling lips. He resolved to batter down the other's guard, to crush him with the sheer weight of blows. Abandoning the point for the edge, he brought his blade down crashing against the ready guard that met it.

But ready as that guard was, it was weak. The repeated strokes of Gislac's mightier arm, the greater weight of his backhand blows and powerful lunges had taken the temper out of the other's more delicate wrist. Gislac felt his sword smash down the blade it touched, knew instinctively that the wrist behind the feeble parry could endure no more, and struck again.

This time there was no guard. The smaller man strove gallantly to raise his weapon, but his stroke lagged. Gislac's blow crashed home, tearing the other's shield asunder, crashing through the metal rings above the shoulder.

Expecting the wounded man to crumple and fall, Gislac drew back. Reeling, his adversary turned with the swiftness of a cat, and spouting blood terribly, ran staggering down the hill. As he turned, Gislac caught the light full on his face. It was the Rotten Reiver.

The command to shoot him down trembled on Gislac's lips, but he could not utter it. Murderer though Richard was, tyrant and oppressor, he was yet a daring, high-mettled man, who had proved his courage. But if Gislac hesitated, one on the wall did not. A bow-string twanged, and an arrow whistled past the ear of the fugitive.

"Cease!" Gislac roared. "Let him live!"

A Saxon curse floated down in answer; but the shot was not repeated. In a moment Sir Richard had ducked behind the awful wall of carrion that had been his cavalry and disappeared in the dark. The pitch-flares died out; the postern clanged to behind Sir Giles.

"Ah, would to God I had slain him!" Gislac moaned. "Would to God I had slain him!"

NEVER in man's memory had the heat been so merciless. The sun hung in the sky like a ball of glowing bronze. Not a puff of air relieved the heavy torpor of the atmosphere. All about High Tower the fields were yellow-brown. The growing crops, trampled by the feet of many horses, were parched into brittle straw on their broken stalks.

Birds did not sing. The horses fretted at their hobbles, lashing out in sullen temper at the flies that tortured them. Armor was a burden to the flesh; yet the listless soldiers in the beleaguering trenches dared not strip off their mail, for fear of the arrows that spat from the battlements as soon as one exposed himself.

It was too hot to fight, too hot to throw dice. From time to time voices rose in querulous anger, quarreling as men will quarrel when there is little to do and that little brings the sweat in streams under sticky mail.

Only behind the lines there was no sign

of idleness, no hint of impatience at the weather and the dragging siege. A quarter of a mile back of the rearmost trench rose three great pavilions, quite a hundred yards apart, the banners of the three allies drooping above them.

At the curtained entrance to each stood men-at-arms, erect, fully armed. Between them horses grazed and picked soldiers exercised throughout the day. At night the cooking-fires gleamed before them, glowing red on the mail of the men-at-arms. Day and night men rode back and forth between these pavilions, receiving orders, bearing reports. Now and then de Born idled over to the quarters of Umfraville; sometimes Umfraville sought out de Born. It was rarely that either of them consulted the man who was brain and soul of their enterprise.

Richard de Monrepaire lay sick and restless under his silken canopy, quarreling with his attendants, snapping at all who approached him. The pain and fever of his wound had exhausted all his carefully nurtured calm, all the smooth cunning that had served him so well. As if pain had not been enough, the defeat he had suffered from Gislac's sortie, as Gislac had foreseen, had cost him his prestige with his dangerous allies.

Even the Flemish mercenaries sent by King Stephen showed a decreased respect, while their officers hung about the tents of Umfraville and de Born. The wisdom of Sir Giles seemed to have proved itself by the outcome. Yet Sir Giles doubted its entire success and was troubled.

His tactics had worked out as he had planned, so far as the condition of his enemies was concerned. Umfraville and de Born, beaten in their clumsy assaults, had lost so heavily as to question the outcome of their enterprise. Above all, they had lost faith in themselves.

If this had been all, matters would still have been perilous for High Tower; for Sir Richard, enjoying the repute of a leader unshaken among discredited subordinates, would then have dominated the other two. He could have forced his counsels on them, and those counsels would have been for sitting down patiently to a slow siege, while hunger wasted the defenders. Gislac had hoped that his sortie would shatter the strength and the standing of the Rotten Reiver and make all three of the chief foes of High Tower sick to death of a war that brought them only defeat and shame. In this hope he was disappointed.

The days dragged on. The sun grew fiercer, the siege more intolerable; yet the surrounding hosts sat doggedly about the Tower, neither loosing their hold nor relaxing their watchfulness. The first of July saw the grim-faced sentries on the wall tightening their belts and counting the scant mouthfuls of their carefully doled ration.

Gislac starved with his men, sharing the dwindling supplies with unselfish justice. No humble soldier, no Saxon serf, even, received less of food or drink than Sir Giles and his daughter. Only one in the tower knew not that famine threatened. Tended with infinite gentleness, Geoffrey de Monrepaire ate and drank of the best and slowly regained his strength on the plenty with which his plate was heaped.

Had he guessed that his betrothed and her father set aside for him the best of their own small share, that the bright cheeks of Margaret grew paler that he might become strong and well, he would have flamed out in a rebellion that would have spoiled all their care had done for him.

Geoffrey mended surprizingly, thanks to his clean youth and the sparkling blood his ancestors had bequeathed him. He could walk about a little now, though not for long; but he might not leave his chamber. He still fretted for his uncle, till Gislac had to tell him that Sir Richard had been slightly wounded in a sortie.

The sun's heat flared down more pitilessly on the half-starved men patrolling the unshaded wall than on their more comfortable enemies, who had the pickings of the whole countryside. Monrepaire's new earldom meant wider domains to pillage, more hard-worked peasants to strip of their laborious stores. The daily ration in High Tower grew less and less. Every day the thin-flanked horses in the stables were culled for meat. Fodder there was little; all the corn fit for human food had been eaten. Now the very chargers, the pick of the stalls, were singled out for flesh. When they were gone, there would be but one recourse—surrender.

Walking the parapet, Sir Giles bit his nails and moodily wondered at the failure of his cunning. Hard as had been the toll in life and glory that his generalship had taken of his enemies, the siege still held on. The camp had all the appearance of permanence;

there was no sign of discouragement, save that there were no more vain assaults.

It seemed that all his well-executed plans had succeeded only in tightening the iron ring about him. He scarcely dared meet the eyes of the men who toiled, watched and famished in his cause. When he looked at his daughter's patient face and noted the hollows growing in her cheeks, he could scarcely hold back the tears. And Henry of Anjou came not.

IT WAS Umfraville who solved the bitter problem. On the morning of the third of July Bermond reported unwonted activity about the three pavilions that hung behind the lines, like three inanimate Fates directing their cruel puppets. There had been a riding to and fro. Umfraville himself had come from the Rotten Reiver's tent, and all Sir Richard's Flemish mercenaries had followed him to his own. Sir Giles climbed wearily to the ramparts.

In the open space between the three pavilions and the trenches a little group of riders ambled toward the hill. Gislac recognized the massive frame and flowing black beard of Umfraville, attended by three of the king's blue-coated spearmen. As the robber baron drew nearer, Gislac could see that he smiled. It was an insolent smile: a smile of triumph.

As they came within arrow-flight, Witta the Saxon, ever ready, drew his bow, scowling hatred. But one of the spearmen waved a white rag, and Sir Giles struck down the bow.

"Let me in, Gislac!" Umfraville bellowed in a voice hoarse from thirty years' crying-on of his hard-fighting ruffians. "Let me in! I bring good luck."

"Not to me or mine," Gislac muttered; but sending a soldier below with a whispered order, he commanded that his enemy be admitted.

When Umfraville rode under the raised portcullis—which was as promptly lowered after him—he found the stable doors shut, the grooms alert and armed and a smart odor of cooking horse-flesh rising from the kitchens.

Sir Giles received him formally in the hall and poured the wine himself. It had cost much to spare that flagon from the thinning supply in the cellars. But Umfraville knew little and cared less; he drank deep and pushed over his cup to be refilled.

"You are done for, Gislac," he said at last, grinning wickedly.

His helmet was off; his bald head shone like polished glass. But the thick jutting beard, with never a hint of gray, belied the age his crown bore witness to. He was a huge bear of a man, bull-necked, strong of arm and shoulder, running to paunch. One of his animal energy could stand much bad living.

Gislac forced a smile.

"Done for?" he repeated pleasantly. "I have done for many of your devil-may-care riders, more of de Born's and not a few of the Reiver's. High Tower can stand much more than you have given her."

Umfraville shook with impudent laughter.

"You have fought well," he admitted. "I have never seen better work done with so weak a garrison. Hard as you have hit me, you have hit Sir Richard harder. Sixteen of his best riders and nine foresters are planted in your earth; as many more are hurt. Monrepaire himself is badly stricken. His wound festers."

"I had not known we took such toll of him," Sir Giles replied. "If you speak truth, why do you not break camp and get away before I grind you to pieces?" he asked amiably.

"That is good wine. Give me some more. Why, you can not grind us to pieces, Gislac. You are cooped up like a tame jackdaw. Your eagle droops his feathers and starves. I read the riddle of those closed stable-doors.

"Why, man! Do we not know your numbers, the condition of your stores? This year's harvest is not in; you have but the fag end of the last. One week more and you will be gnawing your stirrup-leathers. You must yield or starve, and that right soon."

Gislac said nothing. His eyes bored through Umfraville's.

"So I have come to offer you a way out," Umfraville proceeded. "Sir Richard would put you all to the sword or hang you from your own merlons, as soon as hunger should force you out. Make no mistake. Refuse the terms I bring you, and he will stay here till you starve or surrender. And if he stays de Born and I stay with him. He shan't have all the pickings. But if you meet my terms, you may escape with your lives, though with little else."

He paused, and his beady eyes explored his enemy's face.

He saw there little but scorn.

"So you would betray Monrepaire?"

“Betray? Nay, rather outwit. Neither de Born nor I ever swore to stand by him. As Earl of Ashton and Donnet he commands us; we obey because we do not love you. But if we can get what we want of you, our gain is enriched by a good jest.”

Gislac made an impatient gesture.

“We do not need your terms,” he said quietly. “But tell them. I prefer to play with dice I know.”

Umfraville laughed again.

“I thought so,” he answered. “My terms, you must know, are de Born’s also. We stand side by side in this. If the Reiver starves you out, he will seize your castle and all you have; we shall get nothing. Therefore it does not suit us to see the Reiver win yet we would have you lose. We have accordingly made an alliance and have told the Reiver that we shall make our own bargain with you. God’s wounds! You should have heard him rave! Well, you need only depart by the postern gate tonight after twilight has fallen and leave the rest to de Born and me.”

“Your terms!” Gislac retorted.

His voice rang with command.

“These: you must leave without a silver penny, without a horse, without more than the clothes on your back, your sword and enough provisions to last you two days. Your men-at-arms are to take service half with de Born, half with me. That will give us enough strength to defy the Reiver forever. De Born gets your castle and your peasants; I get——”

He hesitated.

“Well?” Gislac questioned.

“Your daughter’s hand in marriage.”

Rising, de Gislac paced up and down the room, his features set and grim. Imperturbable, Umfraville waited, confident of the outcome. It was long before Sir Giles could trust himself to speak. Anguish and rage struggled in his heart. All his high pride, barely held in check while the audacious baron spoke, tugged at the leash.

At last he confronted his enemy, tense with emotion. His lips worked, his voice quivered. Yet there was a majesty about him that overbore defeat.

“UMFRAVILLE,” he began, “you are a thief, a murderer, a profaner of churches, an oppressor of the poor. You are not fit to breathe the same air with a woman of my house. It has come near costing you your life to speak as you have to me. You are stained with every sin, black with every crime—save one: I have never known you to break your word. I accept your terms.”

Umfraville sprang to his feet, his face beaming.

“Why then, de Born is rich, I make a handsome marriage, and you go scot-free. A pretty bargain on both sides. Give me your hand, and we’ll drink to the prettiest bride in England!”

Gislac drew back.

“It is not in the bargain,” he answered proudly. “But two things must be, or I will refuse. First, you must swear that my peasants will be kindly treated. De Born I can not trust. You must swear for yourself and him.”

“A little thing,” Umfraville waved it aside. “But I will swear it. Aye, by the blessed Vernicle! Does that satisfy you?”

Gislac nodded.

“Now the other condition: I have in my castle one who is wounded, and whom I love dearly. I must have safe conduct to take him with me. He will be in a litter. You will let us pass?”

Umfraville grinned.

“Surely. I want no cripples with me. You give your word he is too sore stricken to make a fighting man?”

“He will not fight for many weeks.”

“Then I agree. You have come off well, Gislac.”

Sir Giles turned away, but his enemy drew him back.

“Remember, you leave by the postern. I will be waiting with a guard. De Born and my best spearmen will see to it that Monrepaire’s men do not interfere. As for your daughter, you must bid her farewell at the gate. She rides with me. Never fear. I will deal honestly and well with her.”

As Umfraville thundered out across the draw-bridge, Gislac entered his chamber.

“Send your lady to me!” he commanded the servant; and then, as he waited alone, his sorrow overcame him.

“My God!” he murmured. “Why hast thou forsaken me?”

CHAPTER IX

THE EXILES

“IT WILL kill Geoffrey!”

Gislac took his daughter’s hand and clasped it tight.

"Pray God it be not more than you can bear!" he answered.

His voice shook. Though Margaret's face was white, she was the more composed.

"But for Geoffrey," her father went on, "I would have gone down in red ruin rather than consent. You and I, my child, are too proud to yield when we may die resisting. Never before has a Gislac known shame.

"But if I had refused, what of Geoffrey then? We could not have given him the very food of life more than a few days longer; he must have starved, or—if the Rotten Reiver had forced the castle over our famine-weakened bodies—the murder that failed a month ago would have been carried through. It is in your hands, my dear, to save him."

"What—how can he escape even now?" she faltered.

"I have arranged with Umfraville to take with me a wounded man in a litter. Geoffrey goes with me. Ah, my dear, it is an unknown, a sorrowful journey that he and I must make together!"

Margaret hid her face in her hands. She was too strong to weep, but her supple body quivered with the force of her despair. At last she looked up, white and shaken.

"You have done well, my father," she said bravely.

It hurt to speak, for her throat choked, and her heart beat so hard she could scarce bear it. But her great eyes were steady, resolute, in spite of the sorrow she could not hide.

"You have done well. Our shame is not easy to bear. But how much greater the shame and the heartbreak if we gave him over to death! Whatever life inflicts on us through the cruel years, we shall at least have saved him. I had hoped for happiness, but—thank God my love can give him life! He must not know—he must never guess the price we pay for him, not at least till he is strong enough to endure it."

"Aye, we must keep all knowledge of it from him. But one thing he must know: that we have yielded, since tonight he must go with me. Ah, how can I let you depart from me, my child, whom I love so much?"

They found Geoffrey sitting in his chamber. The young man's eyes brightened as Margaret came in, nor was there any trace of her sorrow in the greeting she gave him.

"What news?" he asked eagerly. "Has my uncle returned?"

Gislac shook his head.

"He has not come, nor can he come in time, my son."

He strove in vain to speak with bluff good-humor.

"We yield and go forth at twilight. Umfraville grants us all life and freedom. Margaret goes free and safe, under escort."

And, indeed, save for the word "free," he spoke truly.

Geoffrey started to his feet and stood tottering with weak excitement.

"You yield!" he cried. "Yield to Umfraville? To de Born? Men you have beaten, men who dare not stand against you?"

Gislac nodded.

"There is no food," he said calmly.

For one instant Geoffrey stared at him; then:

"No food? And all this time you have given me abundance, fed me with dainties? You have—tell me! Have you—has Margaret——"

Gislac interrupted him.

"We have given you the best of what was ours. It was necessary, lest you lose strength and die. Forget that now; remember only that we must make a long journey this night. You must not excite yourself. The leech will give you a sleeping-draft. Be not troubled; it will be well with us all. Umfraville is a man of his word."

THE long English twilight gathered gray about High Tower, clothing wall and camp and hill in its own neutral colorlessness. Umfraville and his escort waited by the postern, straight and silent on their horses, like glimmering statues of blue steel. Below, the whole great camp was grayly distinct, clear-cut in that strange half-gloom, as objects are just before the deeper night.

Here and there watch-fires and cooking-fires already twinkled; but one whole section of the beleaguering circle had been cut out. To the left of this open space the trench and pavilion of Monrepaire were shut off by lines of horsemen, whose spears, held at the ready, faced inward toward the Reiver and his men.

These silent, menacing ranks were the spearmen of de Born and the main host of Umfraville, holding the road clear for Gislac to escape. The Blue Boar had kept his word.

The postern opened. His head held high, Giles de Gislac came forth, his daughter clinging to his arm. She was cloaked and hooded as for a journey. Thomas and Joseph followed grimly, bearing the fore-poles of a litter, the rear of which was supported by two more men-at-arms. Old Martha walked beside the litter, weeping the bitter tears of age. When these had passed, the soldiers of the garrison marched slowly out in column, armed at all points.

Theirs was not the pride of race which forces a smile in the face of humiliation. They walked as men walk to meet shame, sullen and angry. Only their lord's command could compel such a surrender. To starve within the walls would have been death, but death with glory. Their eyes, fixed on the towering form of Gislac and the girl by his side, bore witness to the strong love, the devoted obedience which had forced their acceptance of Umfraville's bitter terms.

Last of all, crowded close together, came the Saxon tenants with their wives and children. They still bore their bows; they glanced furtively from side to side, as if seeking escape. The change of masters was a harsh one for them.

Umfraville nodded to his ancient enemy and bowed gallantly to Margaret. Then his eyes resting on the litter, he asked suspiciously—

"This is the wounded man you spoke of?"

"This is he," the conquered noble answered. "You will not refuse me the use of these four men to bear him whither I go?"

"Not I," Umfraville assured him. "Let them go. I have your word that they will come back when they have borne him to shelter?"

Gislac assented and turned to gaze sorrowfully at the walls he had held so long and so gallantly. Since the days of the Conqueror High Tower had never known a master who was not a Gislac. The last of the name had lost it and with it had lost his daughter and the glory of his name. Understanding, Umfraville suddenly pitied him.

"By the mass, Gislac, I am half-sorry," he cried out. "All my life I have hated you, yet now I could wish I had never raised a lance against you. God be with you, for an honest Norman and a brave-hearted gentleman!"

"I thank you," Gislac answered gently. "Kiss me, my daughter. We part here. The saints know when we shall meet again."

At a signal from Umfraville the escort rode back toward the camp. The homeless garrison followed with lagging steps down the hill, toward the silent trenches of their foes, through the wide gap in the camp. Margaret and old Martha stopped at Umfraville's pavilion, while grooms saddled horses for them. De Born rode up, eying the men-at-arms with greedy appreciation.

"Half-mine, half-thine," he reminded his ally.

"Aye. You had best take over the castle before I go, else the Reiver will forestall you. Pick your men."

So, while Gislac looked on, his enemies divided his faithful retainers between them. Though the men-at-arms knew the next hour would bring them respite from starvation, food as much as their famished bodies craved, there was no joy in their hearts. Their faces were bitter; they looked at their old master as for direction.

Gislac cleared his throat. He strove to put some of his ancient heartiness into his tones, but succeeded ill.

"Tonight you enter into a new service, men," he said "Be true to it as ye have been true to me. My honor rests on your obedience. We have been good comrades. God bless you!"

No voice replied, but their hearts went out to him. The horses for the women were ready. Umfraville turned his charger's head toward the west.

"Come, Margaret," he said; "we ride home!"

"COME, LADS," Gislac ordered. "Gently with the litter!"

The darkness deepened. Ahead Gislac could hear the tramp of many hoofs across the plain. Somewhere among those riders Margaret rode, Margaret with the glowing eyes, Margaret of the high heart.

He thanked God for those good men of his that rode with her. They were Umfraville's now; but they would love and serve her all the more for that. Behind him, like voices in a fog, the sounds of the camp rose up again. His departure had removed the constraint that held all those hundreds silent.

Turning, he saw lights flash out from the arrow-slits in his castle walls. The fires rose again on the ramparts, red tongues of flame stabbing the dusk. The din of arms came from the wall. De Born was master in High Tower.

Gislac looked down at the closed litter where Geoffrey slept, stupefied by the draft the physician had given him. The old man's eyes were sad, but there was resolution in them. His hand stole to his sword-hilt.

"Gislac has still a charge to keep and a sword wherewith to keep it," he murmured. Then aloud:

"Thomas, we lodge tonight at Fulham Priory. The good priests will receive broken men, though nobles will not and peasants dare not. And there, lads, I will bid you farewell. You must go to Umfraville."

They did not answer. Their hearts were full of grief and resentment.

CHAPTER X

HUNTED

THE moon had set when they entered the spacious park in which lay Fulham Priory, so that its fair garden-walks and tall elms appeared but as denser masses of the dark about them. Not a ray of light issued from the windows of the square stone building nestled far back amid its trees and hedges; not a sound from within gave promise of its hospitality.

Setting down the litter, the four men-at-arms waited while he who had been their master knocked at the oaken doors. No answer. Again he knocked and waited long; but the silence was deep as the night. Gislac hammered with his sword-hilt. Instantly a voice, high-pitched and quavering with fright, answered:

"Who knocks? Are ye men of peace?"

"Not only men of peace," Sir Giles retorted, "but men in distress, such as your Savior bids you take in."

To this there was no reply, only silence as before, till the Norman felt his temper rise. It was quite ten minutes before he heard the bolts slide back, the door creak on its hinges and a white-robed monk timidly bid him enter. But the monk bore neither rush-light nor candle. The hall was dark.

"You are not the prior?" Sir Giles asked, as his guide led the way down a black corridor.

Behind him the men-at-arms shuffled along with the litter, muttering as they stumbled in the dark, groping between walls that seemed to reach out at them.

"God forbid that I should aspire to that honor," the Cistercian made answer. "I am Brother John, the porter. Our worthy prior awaits you in the refectory."

He stopped and rapped softly at a door concealed by the gloom. Straightway a square of light opened in the wall, flooding the corridor. Sir Giles found himself in the entrance to a wide rectangular room that had once been a cloistered court, but which was now a roofed hall.

The sturdy Norman pillars met in the sweeping arches on all four sides. Torches set in cressets illumined the bare, stern dignity of the room. The very stones seemed eloquent of austere poverty. There was almost no ornament, and that the simplest of the mason's art.

But that which held the eyes of Gislac and touched his followers' hearts with awe was the white figure at the extreme end of the refectory, high on a daïs above the plain wooden tables and the rough benches, raised above all else there, but raised in unpretentious reverence. His back to them, the prior knelt before a great crucifix, his arms outspread, his eyes turned to the face that looked down from the cross.

Below the daïs, also kneeling, a second monk attended the devotion of his superior. But he seemed absorbed, drawn into the high white figure of the prior, about whom all in that humble room centered and had its spiritual being. One felt that here was a soul great in humility, purified by suffering, interpreting by precept and example the Christ on that high crucifix to the pious monks he ruled.

His arms dropped to his sides. Rising, he backed slowly down the steps of the daïs, with bent head and folded arms. Not till he had descended did he turn to receive his guests. As he advanced to meet them, his hand raised in benediction, Gislac knew that here indeed was a man of God. The prior's tonsured head was bare; his feet were bare; his white robe was of coarsest stuff. The face above his frock was pale; transfused with the spirit that shone from his eyes. They were dark eyes, tender, yet stern. The loose sleeve, falling back from the upraised arm, revealed the unhealed scars of pitiless, self-inflicted penance.

"Peace be with you, Giles de Gislac," he said.

"How do you know my name, Sir Prior? Never have I laid eyes on you nor you on me."

The monk smiled, a smile of singular beauty.

"I never have seen you, I who never leave the bounds of my house. Yet why should I not know you? Norman by your face, noble by the pride that glances from your eyes, honorable and just by features that any one may read—who could you be, if not de Gislac?

"There be four Norman nobles dwelling hereabouts. Three of them are evil men, and the fourth is praised by the poor and the weak. You are that fourth. But how can such as you be in distress? Does your trouble concern him who lies there?"

He indicated the litter, which the four soldiers had set down.

Gislac looked toward the attendant monk, who stood to one side, his lips moving in prayer.

"Can I speak before him?" he asked.

The prior noticed the caution in his tone.

"We be Christ's servants, bound by our vows to relieve the needy," he answered, "trained to hear, see and speak nothing save what is needful. You need not fear."

Gislac stooped and flung back the curtains of the litter, revealing the face of Geoffrey. The boy still slept under the effect of the drug administered to him in High Tower.

"This lad is the young Lord of Monrepaire," he told the prior. "He is yet weak from the wounds inflicted by his treacherous uncle."

And, beginning with the night of Geoffrey's last ride, he told all the tale of the uncle's baseness, of the siege and his own expulsion from the home of his fathers. As he listened, the prior's face grew grave, so grave that Gislac hesitated and finished lamely:

"But I would not bring the wrath of that evil man upon you, holy father. Rather——"

The prior silenced him with a gesture.

"Call me not holy nor father," he answered. "I hold my office by the election of my brethren and am one of them in all things. Call me Brother Matthew.

"Nay, I do not fear Richard de Monrepaire. He has visited us with his black-hearted companions; but finding neither resistence nor aught worth plundering, he has left us in peace. We will shelter you till this young man is well. But ye must keep close, lest any not of our brotherhood see you and spread the word. If it became known that he—" the prior pointed to Geoffrey—"is not dead, Sir Richard would spare neither the sanctity of God's house nor your lives. Pray you be seated. Brother Euphorion, bring food, wine and ewers of water for our guests."

IN THE days that followed Gislac understood the reason for the darkness of Fulham Priory at night, for the fear in the eyes of the porter. That fear hovered ceaselessly over the house; only Brother Matthew seemed not to feel it. Nor were the monks always silent concerning it. They spoke more than once to Sir Giles about the terrible visitations inflicted on religious houses by the lawless barons.

Themselves spared because their utter poverty offered no inducement to violence, they were able to live out their lives of gentle ministry to the poor, of quiet holiness and austere toil.

But they had much to say of the plundering of richer monasteries, the robbery—even the slaughter—of monks who had gathered much of this world's goods; of the pillage, the death, the flame that threatened the helpless wherever the helpless had that which the powerful might covet. Nor did they themselves have any hope that they would be forever undisturbed. Let it be whispered—nay, so much as suspected that the value of a piece of silver was hidden within Fulham Priory; let it be breathed that they sheltered any against whom de Born, Umfraville or Sir Richard held a grudge and they looked to see their roof come tumbling in flames about their heads.

Sir Giles felt a growing uneasiness at all this. It was not in him to find safety by imperiling others. He looked forward with hope and longing to the time when Geoffrey's strength should suffice to let them go forth to shift for themselves.

Geoffrey himself had a simple solution.

"Let us steal forth some night," he suggested eagerly, "when darkness will hide us from the wild riders of Umfraville and de Born; then let us go to Monrepaire. My uncle will welcome us joyfully."

"Aye, that he would," Gislac answered

grimly. "But that must wait till your weak legs can sustain the flight to Monrepaire and your still feeble body can resist the assault of the fever in the night air."

Over and over again this argument had to be repeated. Geoffrey was so filled with the conviction of his uncle's readiness to help them, so devoted to that uncle, so eager to set eyes on him again that it went to Gislac's heart to hear him. Some day the lad must indeed know the full depth of his uncle's wickedness. But not now, when it might break his hard-won hold on life and send him back into sickness and death.

Yet he must be told before they left Fulham Priory. Once they should be on the road, the Rotten Reiver's spies would have to be eluded; his brutal riders would range far and wide for de Gislac, and if one of those riders should see Geoffrey alive——

Therefore Sir Giles watched his companion's gradual recovery with eyes both grim and tender. As they walked about the shady park, always close enough to the doors to take shelter whenever hoof-beats sounded on the road, as they sat in the sleepy July sunshine with the flies buzzing about them and the lazy hum of bees in the air, the elder man watched the thin cheeks of his charge filling out, watched the healthy color steal back, noted the growing firmness of the boy's step with a joy in which deep sadness mingled. When the lad was strong enough to bear it, his happiness must be crushed, his faith in his one living kinsman shattered, his love for Margaret rudely struck down. Gislac feared and dreaded that moment.

One day late in the month Geoffrey's strength seemed so buoyant, the light in his eyes so like that of old that the knight could no longer hide from himself that the time had come. But there was such a gladness in the youth that Gislac again hesitated. The fairness of the day, the pleasant song of the birds had lifted the boy's heart as Summer always lifts the heart of youth.

The lie Gislac had told him as soon as he came out of his sleep on that first night in the priory—the lie prepared from the moment when Margaret said good-by—kept hope and joy alive in Geoffrey.

"Where is she?" Geoffrey had asked.

And the father had answered:

"Safe, lad. She has gone under strong escort to the cloister of our Lady of Sorrows in Peterborough."

Knowing the strength of Peterborough, the city of that great cathedral brotherhood whom even King Stephen dared not offend, Geoffrey was satisfied. The nunnery under the cathedral's protection would be safe against any baron of England.

"When I am well," the boy said many times, "I will go to her."

That very night, soon after they had eaten and the guests had retired to the narrow cell that served them for a chamber, Fate put an abrupt end to Sir Giles' affectionate hesitation. There was a scuffling of feet in the corridor, a frightened knock at the door. Gislac opened it, to see the white face of a monk, staring with fear.

"Quick!" gasped the Cistercian. "Follow me! The riders of Monrepaire!"

Geoffrey sprang up with a glad cry of:

"My uncle! He has come for me! Where is he?"

It took strong hands to hold Geoffrey back, but Sir Giles did it. He had gripped the boy scarcely in time to keep him from rushing through the doorway.

"Let me go!" the boy commanded, beside himself.

Gislac thrust him against the wall and held him there while he told him the bitter truth.

"Richard de Monrepaire is your worst enemy," he said brutally; there was nothing else to do. "It was he who aimed the spear against your breast. It was he who brought de Born and Umfraville about my walls, because I rescued your bleeding body from his assassins. Though he thinks you dead, he hunts me now, because I know his crimes against you and dared interfere with his ruffians. If he lays hands on us, he will hang me and finish the murder he began on you."

Geoffrey met these words with startled, incredulous eyes. Disbelief, anger blazed in the flame that mantled his cheeks. Then slowly, pitifully the flame died out. A sudden understanding—bleak, hurt—took its place.

He loved Margaret's father greatly and knew that no man's lips ever spoke truth more fearlessly. Side by side with his knowledge of Gislac's utter honesty flared the sense of gratitude for the tender care he had given him, even to robbing himself of food. He recalled, all in that moment of horror, that they were fugitives—that Gislac had always refused to ask aid of Sir

Richard; that when he, Geoffrey, had supposed his uncle fighting by Gislac's side in High Tower, Sir Richard had never come to his bedside.

It was true then. His uncle, the friend and comrade of his boyhood, was false to him. His uncle had struck at his life! Geoffrey stood motionless, anguish in his eyes.

Gislac had one arm about his shoulders, supporting, comforting him.

"Come, lad!" he said. "We must make haste, if we would live. Come!" Gislac repeated, groping about in his mind for something that would rouse Geoffrey from his grief.

* * *

IT WAS time to go. Loud voices could be heard from the park below. The monk shifted from one foot to the other in his anxiety, imploring them to make haste.

"Come, or you will not live to find Margaret," Gislac urged.

Starting from his stupor, Geoffrey responded to her name rather than to the urgency in Gislac's voice.

A startled back-glance down the corridor assured the monk that the pursuit was not immediately on their heels.

"Speed!" he begged them. "The prior can not hold them from the search for long!"

He turned to the northern corner of the building, where the corridor angled over what had been the north cloister before it had been roofed in. Somewhat less than halfway along it he drew a taper from the folds of his robe, looked furtively about and ignited the rush with flint and steel. Holding the light to the floor close to the outer wall, for there was neither window nor sun-port to let in the light of day, he ran his fingers along the surface of several stones.

" 'Tis here!" he exclaimed in vast relief; and as he spoke, one whole slab turned under his hand. "The prior had it built against just such happenings as this. We have sheltered fugitives before now. You will come out by the river; we will bring you food."

He held his taper to the opening, a square orifice just large enough for a man to enter by stooping. Sir Giles ducked and was through, holding out one hand for Geoffrey. Following, the young man found himself at the head of a steep and narrow stairway, built between two thicknesses of wall.

As the fugitives found their footing, the monk's hand and rush-light disappeared. The stone was back in its place above them.

"I wondered," Gislac commented, "why so well-made a cloister had been walled up. Brother Matthew may well have had full many a man to hide since Stephen came to curse England. Steady, lad! Hold to me."

For all of two score steps they descended; till Sir Giles, thrusting forward for the step, set his foot down hard on the level. He groped out and found a railing, moist to the touch.

"Turn!" he directed. "So! Now we are beneath the earth's surface. Feel how damp it is, and smell the mold! Breath of the saints, how deep must we go?"

But as he spoke, he felt a puff of fresher air strike his cheek and turned in its direction, drawing Geoffrey after him. They emerged into a low straight tunnel. There was now no foulness in the air, but almost a breeze from somewhere out-of-doors. In a few moments they saw the stars and came out of the tunnel into a thicket of reeds. They could hear water splashing softly near by.

"That is the river," Sir Giles whispered. "We had best move to one side of this passage, so that we may slip away if any should follow."

It was not hard to find a comfortable place among the reeds. The unusually warm Summer had shrunk the stream, so that they were quite dry; and they gathered some of the dead reeds and made of them a soft bed. They lay there for what seemed hours, till their excitement passed, and they began to talk in low whispers.

Suddenly Gislac hissed softly, and Geoffrey was still. Waiting anxiously, they presently heard stealthy movements among the rushes. Gislac flattened himself and slowly, with infinite pains, wormed toward the sound.

Minutes passed breathlessly. Then a harsh voice swore close at hand. Geoffrey put out his hand but could not touch his companion. It was too dark to see. Strange thoughts, ominous of evil, haunted his brain. Then something pounced softly. There was a muffled sound as of something threshing about among the reeds, and silence.

The touch of Gislac's exploring fingers startled the boy.

"One of Richard's men-at-arms," he reported. "I had him by the throat before he could stir and got my dagger through his wind-pipe. God knows what the good prior will say to that in the morning."

They slept well in the warm night air and woke to the flutter and *cheep* of birds before sunrise. For an hour or more they lay luxuriously among the rushes, sniffing the fine, fresh air of morning. Then Gislac rose.

"I must bury that skulking dog I slew last night," he announced and crept off through the reeds.

When he returned, he wore an air of complacency.

"Not so bad for an old man," he smiled. "It was your uncle's chief hangman and bully, Big Blaise."

Geoffrey's face saddened.

"He was always good to me," he said.

"You are the first then. Never a woman was safe from him nor a child that got in his way. Many a priest's toes has he singed. My peasants lay the Merton burning at his door."

"Merton Abbey?" Geoffrey gasped. "That—my uncle's deed!"

The words came slowly, as if horror held them fast.

About the third hour after sunrise they were roused by the crackling of the rushes. The sound, close at hand, had come as if from nowhere.

"It will be one of the monks from the passage," Sir Giles hazarded.

It was. The Cistercian brought food and a small jug of wine.

For four days they lived thus among the reeds, drinking of the river, fed by the kindly monks. Each morning and night they were visited. Always they were told that the Reiver's horsemen still hung about the neighborhood. On the fifth day the prior came, and his bearing told them his news.

"They have gone back," he said. "You may return to the priory."

Gislac glanced at Geoffrey, who shook his head. It was as if the boy asserted his leadership, for Gislac was quite ready to stay on for a time.

"We must go," Geoffrey said. "It is far to Peterborough."

A pang of pain stopped Gislac's heart for a moment.

"Nay, lad," he said. "If a father can curb his impatience, can not a lover? We must first make our way south or east to some Channel port. Being men, we have work to do. We must to France, find Henry of Anjou and lend him our poor aid to make him King of England!"

The prior raised his hand in blessing.

"God speed you," he prayed, "both in your own and in your country's cause. Christ will fight for King Henry. Young man, you are weaponless. Would I had a sword to give you!"

"I have seen to that," quoth Gislac.

He moved toward the river and came back bearing a sheathed sword.

"The sword of Big Blaise will henceforth fight on the side of honor," he said.

Brother Matthew looked a grave question, and Sir Giles forthwith told him of the coming and death of Blaise. The prior looked anxious.

"There has been no inquiry after him?" Gislac asked.

"Not yet. He lingered after his fellows had gone. It will be thought he rode off on some news of you. But I would this had not happened."

"I have buried him deep and covered the grave well. They will find no trace of him to bother you with," Gislac assured the priest. "Now, good father, receive the thanks of hard-pressed men for the gift of life and Christian kindness. If Gislac ever comes to prosperity again, he will not forget the favor given to Gislac in wretchedness."

Geoffrey said nothing, but stooping, kissed the prior's robe. Brother Matthew laid his hand caressingly on the boy's head.

"I think," he said, "that God loves such as you, my son!"

CHAPTER XI

SWORDS OF THE NIGHT

THAT night's supper done and a small supply of bread and meat laid by in a leathern pouch, the two exiles left Fulham Priory behind them at the first fall of dusk. They took the road that ran southward and westward toward the meeting of the Sollett and the Flamwell at Merton. That way led to London, to the sea, whence one might sail to France. It was no road for the two to travel in open day.

"Norman you were and therefore safe," Gislac expounded, "as long as you were in your own house. But now, my lad, being homeless and friendless, you may consider yourself Norman no longer. The glory of your race will no longer clear a way for you. If you meet a Saxon churl, will he bow down to you now and fetch you food? Not he. He will scowl at you, perhaps report to his lord that he has seen masterless men loose on the highway.

"What then? We shall have your uncle's men-at-arms after us. Or do you meet a Norman *seigneur*, one who was proud to count himself your equal in the old days. Now, seeing you helpless, he will snatch you off to his dungeons for the looting of your sword and garments. Or worse—he will send for Sir Richard. Say you meet a man-at-arms. He will stare haughtily——"

"Hush!" Geoffrey broke in suddenly. "Look yonder!"

Something flashed on the crest of the hill before them—the light of the rising moon kindled on steel, as a mounted man rode down the nearer slope. Shrinking into the first patch of shadow, the fugitives crouched close. A snatch of song floated toward them. The moonlight twinkled on the point of a sloping lance.

Now he was but a spear's length away—a big man, but lithe and well formed, sitting his saddle with easy grace. He wore complete chain-armor, of a style Geoffrey and Gislac had never seen before. Instead of ending at the neck or across the chin, it was continued in a mask for the cheeks. Little could be seen of his face, what with the mask, the long nasal of his peaked helmet, and the pale light of the moon. Yet there was something about him that whispered subtly of overseas.

"Outland mail?" whispered Geoffrey. "But he rides better than any Fleming."

"More like a Frenchman," answered Sir Giles. "Back, lad! Keep back!"

But Geoffrey, unheeding, sprang out into mid-road with empty, upraised hand. Not yet had he learned the instinctive caution of the hunted; moreover, his enemies were Normans, and this man, by his dress, seemed none of them. The boy acted on a half-formed purpose. If a Frenchman, this horseman might know some news of Henry of Anjou.

"Greeting, fair sir!" he cried. "Are you from France?"

The stranger dropped his lance to the half-rest with a practised ease that spoke the confident soldier. A pressure of the wrist, and he would be in posture of attack.

"Even from Languedoc," he replied with a mellow accent that proved his words. "Whose man are you, Norman, that you challenge an ambassador on the highway?"

"No man's man," Geoffrey declared. "But I would gladly serve Henry of Anjou, if I might get news of him. Since you are of Languedoc, you must be of his following?"

"Even so. Has my Lord Henry many such frank and valiant friends hereabouts? How many more of you are there behind that hedge?"

"Only myself," spoke Sir Giles, stepping forward into the moonlight, for fear lest the mounted man mistrust Geoffrey and ride him down.

But the Frenchman raised his lance to the slope again and drew quietly nearer.

"Henry's partisans will not always need to skulk in hedgerows or ride warily by night," he said.

"Has Henry landed?" cried Geoffrey and Sir Giles together. "Is he in England now?"

"Aye, he has landed," the stranger answered slowly. "He has come—and he has gone, having made peace with Stephen. His captains urged him to seize his kingdom by the sword, but good men's lives being dearer to him than ambition, he compromised.

"Henry is to become king when Stephen dies; but Stephen remains king while he lives. I ride to Portsmouth with tidings for Henry in France. He is my master."

All the joy, all the long-cherished hope faded from Gislac's eyes. Gone were those few brief weeks when he and Geoffrey might have been welcome recruits in the invader's camp. Gone, while they lay besieged in High Tower, while Geoffrey recovered strength at Fulham.

Now that the Count of Anjou had won the succession to the throne, he would busy himself in his French domains, little heeding what Stephen's barons might do to certain obscure men of whom he had never heard.

Stephen, though weak of will, was strong and hale of body. He might live to misgovern England for years. Little chance had two friendless adventurers of surviving him.

"Courage, my friends!" laughed the Frenchman, reading the dismay in their faces. "We will drink together at King Henry's court some blithe day, you and I. Now I must ride on my errand, which brooks no delay. Farewell! May the blessing of my patron, St. Peter the Swordsman, be upon you!"

"And on you, brave sir," Geoffrey answered courteously. "But when we meet, you will know our faces, yet we shall not know yours."

"Know then my name," the Frenchman retorted. "Men call me Pierre de l'Espée."

Away he rode, while Geoffrey stood looking after him with admiring eyes and a sorrowing heart. Ah, he had dreamed of becoming just such a gallant captain in Henry's service, and then, when the victory should be won, of riding in triumph to Peterborough and claiming Margaret for his bride. Now that dream vanished with the stranger who had ridden into and out of his life so casually.

Geoffrey turned a saddened face to Gislac.

"Whither do we go now?" he asked.

"Aye, whither?" echoed the other dully. "Wherever we turn, death waits."

SIR GILES felt suddenly very worn and old. He had counted on Henry's coming to bring about Stephen's downfall, the destruction of his own and Geoffrey's enemies and a fair end to his own afflictions. This last great hope having failed him, he knew not where to begin anew. Without money or friends, with only his sword and Geoffrey's—without even a mail hauberk between them, what could they do?

They were fair prey for the first robber baron or the first brace of sturdy outlaws. Even should they win to the coast alive, they had neither the skill to work their passage to France nor the assurance of welcome there, now that there was to be no war. Despondently Gislac stood in the dust of the road, bitterly aware that the boy was looking confidently to him for the guidance and counsel he had not to give.

As Geoffrey waited, he made up his own mind.

"Let us go to Peterborough," he offered shyly. "There, in that strong and holy city we shall be safe till the new king comes and the evil times are at an end. And we shall be with Margaret."

"Margaret!"

Her father could not stifle the groan of anguish that the thought of her tore from him. Geoffrey searched Gislac's face with frightened eyes.

"Why do you speak her name so fearsomely?" he cried. "Have you ill news that you have been keeping from me? Is she in peril? Is she—is she——"

Gislac shook his head. In vain he strove to think of some plausible answer. He had neither the heart nor the invention to carry the deception further. Geoffrey was now well again; the time had come when he must be told the truth.

"Margaret lives," he said, "but not at Peterborough."

"Not at Peterborough? But you told me——"

"A lie! When you were so weak that the truth would have slain you swifter than a sword-thrust. Learn the truth now, and the blessed saints give you the fortitude to bear it.

"Had you been found at the taking of High Tower, you must have fallen into your uncle's hands and been put to death. There was but one way to smuggle you out alive, and that was to accept the terms offered by your uncle's allies behind his back. By those terms de Born obtained High Tower, and Umfraville——"

He faltered, but Geoffrey read the rest in his eyes.

"Margaret!"

Sir Giles nodded.

"Of her own free will she gave herself for you. It was the only way."

"Oh—why did you let her?" the young man cried. "Ah, that I should live at such a price! Why did you not refuse and let me die?"

"To what avail? We were starving. They would soon have stormed the tower. What of Margaret then, a prisoner of war? Unless she had stabbed herself and died in mortal sin, she might have suffered a far worse fate than to be Umfraville's wife."

Geoffrey answered not. He stood silent and rigid, as if turned to stone. No marble saint had a whiter face than his under the moonlight. But it was no saint-like change that came over his features; the blood that had rushed to his heart at the shock of

Gislac's dreadful news now poured back into his veins, hot with wrath and a fierce urge for vengeance. He was no more the gentle child of his Saxon mother but the fighting son of his fighting sire, old William de Monrepaire.

Though he spoke no word, there leaped to his mind, so sharply that he seemed to hear it shouted aloud, the ancient Norman cry for justice:

"*Haro! Haro! On m'a fait tort!*"

But to whom in all England could he turn for justice? To none but himself!

Whirling about, Geoffrey strode blindly down the road, his brain hot, his long sword thumping against his thigh.

"Where are you going, lad?" cried Gislac, running after.

"To Umfraville," said Geoffrey in a strange, hard voice. "To kill him!"

"You are mad!" the older man protested. "Flamford Keep is strong; he holds it with four score spears. What can you do alone?"

"Challenge him to fight me man to man!"

"He will laugh at you and send his men-at-arms to throw you into his dungeon."

"They will never take me—I will fight till I am slain!" Geoffrey declared. "I have no wish to live long, God knows!"

Gislac knew then that he had indeed done well to keep his black news from the lad till he recovered from wounds and fever. Yet, after all, the blow had been fatal. The dreamer in Geoffrey's soul had died when the warrior was born.

"You go with me?" the boy asked. "Good! Here lies our way."

Climbing the hill that had lain before them, they descended into the valley beyond. Through it a shallow brook tinkled at their feet, to flow into the Sollett, a bow-shot to the left. Geoffrey turned to the right and began to wade up-stream.

"Are you mad?" called the dumfounded Gislac. "This rises in the heart of the Murkwood, where your uncle's foresters keep watch."

"I care not," Geoffrey retorted. "It is the shortest way to Flamford Keep and Umfraville."

Stooping under the overhanging branches that cast flickering moon-shadows on the running stream, he pressed on, leaping from stone to stone, taking to the bank when it was clear, wading the pools, scaling the mossy cliffs beside the falls. With a shrug of his broad shoulders Gislac followed.

As he grew warmer with the exertion of the rugged way, Gislac's heart caught some spark of the fire that consumed his companion. After all, he thought, what matter whether they died tonight, riddled by the shafts of the Reiver's foresters, or tomorrow, torn by the spears of Umfraville's men-at-arms?

At least they would die in the open, facing the foe. Now that their fortunes were broken past mending, the boy's madness was as good as his elder's wisdom, which had brought them to this state.

Mile after breathless mile they worked their way up-stream, advancing toward the northwest and mounting the long ridge that divided the valleys of the Flamwell and the Sollett. They were not far from the crest, and the brook had dwindled to a rill that a man might easily bestride, when a sudden, ominous crackling sounded from the undergrowth from every side. Out flashed their two swords, as dark forms sprang forth from the shadows.

" 'WARE steel!" cried a rough voice. "Draw shafts and shoot!"

Though the light was poor for arrow-work, the range was point-blank.

"Hold!" countermanded a second voice. "It is the good Sir Giles!"

"Witta!" exclaimed Gislac, as the second speaker stepped into the moonlight.

Five more men, rough-clad, shock-headed, came out of the shadows, unbending longbows as they came.

"What," asked Gislac, "are you and these other tenants of mine—ah! of de Born, I should say—doing here?"

"You have said it yourself, my lord," the peasant replied. "Your men we were and are. We will never serve de Born!"

Gislac's voice was stern:

"I gave over my castle to de Born. My tenants go with it. Umfraville swore that you would be fairly treated, and he is a man of his word."

Witta laughed.

"So is not de Born! I heard Umfraville speak for us; I heard de Born's evil answer. Thinking how our arrows had galled him in the siege, I grew cold with fear as I listened in the dark. While they busied themselves holding off the Reiver and dividing your men-at-arms among them, I crept back to my people. All of us whom you had sheltered in the castle—forty men, with women and little children—slipped through the lines and fled into the Murkwood.

"Here we found Godulf and two score of the Rotten Reiver's Saxon tenants, who had plucked up heart to walk the greenwood while his foresters were at the siege. Some have crawled back to be whipped like the spiritless curs they are. Godulf and thirty others hide in the wood, as we do. He is a brave old churl, that Godulf, but he is a brainless fool."

"And why?" asked Gislac.

Witta's words were kindling hope in his heart.

"Because he would have us heap up stones and make a stand on the top of Lightwood Knoll, over yonder. It is hard to scale and easy to defend. But there is no water; we should perish of thirst. Godulf has never known a siege. And besieged we shall be, if we follow his counsel.

"The Reiver's foresters have been lurking about to find our hiding-place; and we, in turn, have crept up and listened to the talk around their camp-fires. 'Tis the time of wheat-harvest, and none to reap. The Reiver and the Brown Bull miss our labor sorely. Soon they will close in from either side and sweep the forest clear."

Gislac's smile was grim.

"What will you and your fellows do then, Witta? And your wives and children, who are doubtless hidden in the thickets?"

"We will flee in time to the south, to the woods beyond the Sollett. I am no stubborn fool like Godulf——"

"Nay, but you are!" Geoffrey broke in, stepping forth from behind Gislac. "You are even such a fool as he, twinned at the same birth. To stand and be caught or to flee and be driven to a worse place and be hounded out by other Normans! Both are folly."

"What else—" began the Saxon, but he broke off in sudden fear, staring at the young man as at a demon.

Almost at once his fellow tenants recognized Geoffrey. They shrieked in terror and fell on trembling knees, crossing themselves.

"A ghost!" cried Witta. "Spare us, noble sir! In life you suffered no hurt from us; in death spare us!"

"Peace!" Sir Giles commanded them. "He is no ghost but flesh and blood, even as yourselves."

In short words he told how he had found Geoffrey, not dead but sorely wounded, and had suppressed the fact of his recovery, lest the Rotten Reiver hear of it. Their lips still pale, the Saxons took comfort, but their glances were still uneasy.

Witta recovered first.

"Why say you we are fools, young master?" he asked, looking curiously at Geoffrey's tall figure, his proud Norman features and his blond Saxon hair. "Why should we not flee? What else is there to do?"

Geoffrey fixed the man with piercing eyes.

"Ye can not defend," he answered. "Ye can not flee. But ye can—attack!"

"Attack?" the astounded Saxons echoed. "But how?"

"How?"

Geoffrey's voice was vibrant with purpose.

"Have ye not forty men and Godulf thirty—seventy good bowmen in all—here in the heart of the Murkwood? Are ye not between your foes, so that if either moves out against you, ye can fall upon him and slay him before the other comes to his aid? Are ye not a match for the foresters and more than a match for mailed horsemen, so long as ye stay here among the trees? Are not your enemies divided, distrustful of each other, foolishly disdainful of you? Attack, while they least expect it. Overthrow them all, one after the other!"

Witta shook his head doubtfully.

"Brave words, young lord. But what would it avail us if we beat the foresters, slew the barons and burned their castles? The king's men and every Norman in all England would come down upon us to torture and hang those Saxon serfs who dared rise against their lawful lords."

The other peasants muttered their approval of their leader's words. But Sir Giles laid a hand on Geoffrey's shoulder and bade them look upon him.

"Here," he said, "is your liege lord and mine. For the earldom of all this region, conferred by the king on Richard de Monrepaire, is rightfully due to Geoffrey, true heir to the estates the Reiver falsely holds. Never has he had part in his uncle's evil deeds, nor has any of you suffered worse wrong than he at the Reiver's hands. Godulf will confirm what I tell you.

"Here is a Norman captain to lead you.

He has come back from the gates of death to fight for his own and for you. What baron will interfere between a Norman and his foes? You are safe beneath the shield of Geoffrey de Monrepaire. His foes are yours; his sword strikes for you. Will you fight for him?"

Slowly Witta met his gaze. Slowly the Saxon thought, but at last he bowed his head.

"I will!" he answered. "And you, lads?"

"Aye," the Saxons shouted. "Fight we will!"

CHAPTER XII

THE LADY OF FLAMFORD

RANULF DE UMFRAVILLE, the Blue Boar of Flamford, held ever true to one rule of conduct, "One thing at a time." His brain was cunning, with the craft of the hard-hitting, hard-living robber baron; but his blood had not inherited nor his training fostered a wide vision.

When he thought of the future at all, he thought in simple terms, devised pettily shrewd schemes, the base of which was treachery. Yet he took great pride in that tarnished thing he called his honor; and making a point of keeping his word, he took great pains not to give it unnecessarily.

His intrigue with de Born against the Rotten Reiver had been a simple thing. Never having sworn to keep faith, he did not conceive that good faith obliged him to act against his own interests. Thus he schemed without compunction, one thing at a time. First, a secret compact with de Born; next, a bluff defiance in the Reiver's teeth; then, terms with Gislac.

He saw certain advantages in a marriage with Gislac's daughter: the prestige her noble blood would add to his house; the claim to her father's estates, if de Born should chance to die. It even entered his head that perhaps in a year or so de Born might be aided to die. This was as far as Umfraville had thought the matter out.

Had he been truly wise, had his cunning been leavened with the least dash of imagination, he would have perceived at once a flaw that came near to wrecking his schemes. That flaw was forced on his attention swiftly and sternly.

He managed his withdrawal from High Tower like a good soldier. For a brief, frantic hour before the garrison's surrender he had had his capable hands full to restrain his jubilant men-at-arms from drinking themselves helpless and to round up the horses and mules in his camp for a swift departure. His arrangements with de Born would hold off the wounded Reiver until he could get safely away from the latter's anger. But de Born himself, rapacious beyond measure, secretly incited his men to steal Umfraville's beasts during the confusion of breaking camp. Foreseeing this—for he knew his ally—the Blue Boar took precautions. The lack of discipline among his hard-bitten followers made his task heavy; but he was equal to it.

Once he had selected his half of Gislac's men and Margaret had mounted beside him, he rode off in triumph. Not for long, however. He was soon obliged to halt, for the hunger and weariness of his new retainers made them laggard on the march. When they had eaten, he made many of his own men-at-arms give up their horses to Gislac's former warriors and so pushed on for no more than ten miles west of High Tower.

Here there was a pleasant glade, where the exhausted soldiers from High Tower might rest, till a night's sleep and more food should put fresh vigor in their limbs.

Having made the round of his sentries and seen that all was in good order, Umfraville strode eagerly through the dusk toward his tent. It was the only shelter in his camp, and by his order Margaret was lodged in it. The purpose to see her, to speak with her, was in his mind. She was his now, and her lovely face would reward him well for the toil he had endured in the siege. Having had scarce opportunity for a dozen words with her since they had left High Tower, he was minded to seek some consolation now.

He was surprized to see the entrance guarded not only by the trooper he had ordered there but by a second man whom he knew not, but who was plainly one of the soldiers he had taken from Gislac. Making to go past him, Umfraville was stopped by the man's lowered spear.

"Stop, my lord baron," the soldier commanded. "You may not enter!"

Umfraville's face darkened with anger. His own retainer, on the other side of the entrance, laid one hand uncertainly on his sword, waiting for a sign from his master.

"Clear the way, fellow," the baron roared. "Who are you, to bandy words with the Umfraville?"

The soldier, a tall, heavily muscled man, stood his ground.

"I am Bermond," he answered slowly, "once captain of the wall in High Tower. When we were parted betwixt you and de Born, you chose me."

"You are my man, then, sworn to obey me," the Blue Boar cried.

"You, too, are sworn, my lord—sworn to deal honorably with my lady of Gislac. I am here to see that you keep your oath. I have made a vow to the Blessed Virgin that neither you nor any man shall bring shame upon my gracious lady."

Umfraville's rage clutched him by the throat.

"You, a dog of a spearman, to use such words to me! You shall hang for this! Ho! Turn——"

Bermond clapped an unceremonious hand over his new master's mouth. At sight of this unspeakable act, the other guardsman took a step forward. But Bermond, half-turning, tripped him up with the haft of his spear.

"Do not call, my lord," he cautioned sternly. "Nor draw your blade. Call off your man here. One shout, one flash of steel, and half your host will be at the other's throats!"

The thought surged into Umfraville's brain that Bermond's words were literally true. Gislac's men, whom he had brought with him from High Tower, were equal in numbers to the cutthroats of his original force. Weakened by hunger as they had been, they were none the less fierce, well disciplined, devoted to their lady.

"Few would leave this glade alive and hale, were such a fight begun," Bermond prompted. "Who would protect my lady then?"

Umfraville shrugged his great shoulders.

"As you will," he submitted. "Yet I meant your lady no harm. May a man not speak with his betrothed?"

"Fetch a priest, turn the betrothal into a wedding, and none of us will say you nay," the spearman answered. "Hold us not for rebels, my lord. In all save this we will serve you faithfully, as our old master bade us."

THEN it was that Umfraville saw the flaw in his scheme, and his fists balled with rage.

"Aye, fetch a priest, say you!" he muttered. "And a wedding! Fool that I was, not to have thought! What good would a priest do me? Why, fellow, I have been excommunicated these seven years, deprived of the sacraments for the churches I have pillaged. What wouldst thou have me do, then? Send to Rome for indulgence? Pray the Pope to come marry me?"

"Nay."

Bermond was stolid.

"Send to Canterbury. Thomas Becket, clerk to the archbishop, is my lord de Gislac's friend. He will persuade his master to permit the wedding, perhaps to raise the ban from you."

Umfraville shook his head.

"Thomas Becket and Theobold, the archbishop, are enemies to King Stephen and hate us of the baronage."

"Ask the king to intercede with the archbishop for you," Bermond suggested hopefully.

Umfraville pondered this. He had been excommunicated by the Primate of York with King Stephen's full assent. But now he was in a position to ask favors again, having compelled the surrender of the proclaimed outlaw de Gislac.

Moreover, there were rumors from London that Henry of Anjou meditated an invasion. Stephen would be ready to conciliate good fighting men. The Archbishop of York, unlike the high-principled Theobold, was ever ready to bless or ban at the king's nod.

It would take time to send a messenger to London and much longer before any response could come from York. Umfraville was a man of strong passions, but stronger shrewdness. Left to himself, he might have solved his trouble by cynically dispensing with the marriage service, for the strain on his plighted word was great. But he needed the loyalty of Bermond and his forty comrades.

He could not afford to provoke a fight that, even if he won, would leave his force a shattered wreck at the mercy of the resentful Richard de Monrepaire. He recalled ruefully that the Reiver had never been known to forget a wrong.

Moreover, by marrying Margaret he would win advantages that a less legal relation might rob him of. And finally, ruffian though he was, there were moments when he trembled at the thought of the fires of hell. Once the ban against him was raised, confession and penance might yet assure him of salvation.

"I will ask the king," he promised. "I will send a messenger to him tomorrow, when we cross the London road. When word comes that the church lifts her curse from me, then we shall hold our marriage. Till then, whether she lie in camp or in bower, the Lady Margaret will be as if she were my sister—which the saints be praised she is not. I swear it, on my honor. Does this suffice you, Bermond of the Wall?"

"It does. Henceforth we shall fight for our lady's husband as we once fought for her father," Bermond answered.

The rumble of thunder broke in upon his words. Lightning shot through the Summer night.

"Shall we build you a hut of boughs, my lord?"

"No," growled Umfraville, going over to the nearest fire, where he lay on the turf and rolled himself up in his campaigning-cloak. Ten minutes later rain was hissing on the camp-fires, but the Blue Boar slept stoically through the storm.

At dawn the march was resumed. By noon they had crossed the Flamwell Bridge at Monrepaire. Westward and up the valley they rode, leaving the Murkwood behind and riding out into open country that once had been fair and fertile.

But now the fields were fast losing their contours beneath the flood of new wild growth. The cattle had long been driven off; the few wretched folk that still lingered by their ravaged hearths fled into hiding at the first glint of spear-points through an approaching dust-cloud.

Margaret felt these sights of desolation with a bitterness greater for the callous indifference of the hulking baron by her side. Her heart, heavy beyond bearing with her own grief, melted in pity for the crumbling, roofless cottages, the rotting byres, the burned and desecrated ruin of the parish churches in the villages through which they passed.

Everywhere lay the mark of the oppressor, the sign-manual of the baron, that now rested pitilessly on her own soul. The physical ruin about her symbolized and made more terrible the ruin of her hopes.

Late in the afternoon of the third day after leaving High Tower, they came in sight of a village where the thatch was still on the roofs and men with hopeless faces were toiling in the surrounding fields. The river, that had been narrowing as they neared its source, broadened here, and there was a group of houses on either bank—sure sign of a ford between.

It was, indeed, the lowest ford on the river, and an important point on the ancient trade-route that came down from across the northern hills, where the robber-castle of the de Borns showed, a square dot on the distant sky-line.

Since early Saxon times the ford on the Flamwell had been known as Flamford. Before the Saxon came, Roman military engineers had paved the crossing and built beside it a strong, square fort with a wet moat so wide and deep that the enclosure was virtually an island.

On their eternal foundations now rose the outer walls of Flamford Keep, with a small square tower at each angle, enclosing a tall, three-sided Norman pile that was both donjon and hall. The bailey, or courtyard between the inner fortress and the outer ramparts, was large enough to contain all Umfraville's tenants and cattle and was sown to grass to provide forage for the beasts in time of siege. There was a never failing well, and the storerooms were kept full. Though Flamford Keep stood on low ground, few nobles in England had a stronger fortalice.

AS SHE passed under the portcullis into the gloomy hold, Margaret felt its shadow strike cold upon her heart. She glanced quickly at the man beside her, the man whom she must take for husband; and her pain seemed greater than she could bear. But he heeded not.

"Home at last, my dove!" he cried heartily; and she shrank from him.

But she was instantly ashamed. She had made a bargain, and she resolved to fulfil it like her father's daughter.

A slatternly maid and two grooms were caught up in the midst of their servile bowing by Umfraville's shouted order to clean out the bower for their new lady. It was a musty den, spotted with mold and shrouded with cobwebs, that had not been used or looked into since the Blue Boar's mother died. It was hastily swept and put in order.

Margaret surveyed it in dismay; nor did the wave of homesickness that engulfed her abate at the sight of the two trembling crones summoned from the village to attend her. The dirt and damp everywhere offended her dainty soul far more than fear could daunt her.

But a harder ordeal awaited her. She was sent for at nightfall to dine in the great hall. She found her place beside Umfraville on a raised daïs beneath a canopy at the upper end of the hall. At right angles to their table, but below the daïs another table stood, longer and rougher, made up of trestles and sections of planking that between meals were stacked against the wall.

This stretched far down the rush-strewn, stone-flagged floor. There every other member of the household, save only the wenches and varlets that served the rest, was seated in his proper place, from the captains at the head to the stable-knaves at the foot.

Though larger, dirtier, more primitive, the scene was so like what she had known at High Tower, with so many familiar faces among the men-at-arms, that Margaret could scarce endure it. When Umfraville began to feed bits of meat to his favorite goshawk on its perch at his shoulder, it brought back the memory of her father so vividly that her eyes filled with tears.

Her father! And—Geoffrey!

"Have you no lust for food, after so long a ride?"

Umfraville's bearded lips were twisted into a sardonic smile. He had little sympathy for sentimental weakness and a liking for heavy sarcasm; yet there was the least touch of tenderness in the sneer. The fat steward, standing attentively behind the baron's chair, felt the sarcasm but not the tenderness.

Taking his cue accordingly, he smiled. The tears in the girl's eyes pleased him. He still resented the cleaning of the bower, in which he had been forced to do his part. Bermond looked up in time to see his smile and grew hot with impotent anger.

But Margaret needed no man's aid. Roused by Umfraville's sneer, her first feeling was one of shame that she should have come so near showing her grief in public. This was the ransom for her father's liberty and her lover's life. Well, she would pay it. If she must be Umfraville's wife, and mistress of Flamford Keep, now was the time to show that she could rule it indeed, as she had ruled High Tower and every soul within its walls. Her woman's pride rose to strengthen her. She could hold her own when the weapons were wits and tongues. The stewart's insolent grin determined her point of attack. Before the baron could repeat his question, she answered it with her first barbed shaft.

"No lust for such food as this," she said sweetly. "It is ill-cooked, worse savored and vilely served. This dish—you have good plate, my lord—is coated thick with grease. The table is scarce half-scoured, the canopy above us sags with the dust upon it, the fresh rushes on the floor have been strewn upon the old, and all is thick with the dirt of your long absence. It is shameful that such a homecoming should be prepared for you, my lord, after your toils and perils in the field!"

Umfraville stared blankly. Never before had he heard a woman wax indignant over his discomfort, nor had he ever felt any discontent with the ordering of his house.

"You are in a warrior's hall, not in a maiden's bower," he said with an air of bluff masculinity.

"The more reason that it should be well kept," she retorted. "Had you been the besieged instead of the besieger at High Tower, you would have learned the worth of food. You would not let those knaves now rising from those benches down there leave their beechen bowls half-full of good pease porridge, that should go to the reapers in the wheatfields, who ply their sickles as if their arms were palsied with famine.

"And you suffer your steward to throw great gobbets of meat to rot and breed flies and fever on the vast kitchen-midden I saw but now from the bower window. How long is it since you held an accounting with him, my lord?"

The tarnished silver chain that was his badge of office rose and fell on the steward's agitated and ample bosom, while Umfraville tried to remember whether it was last Christmas or last Candlemas. He was a man of action and the open and hated these bothersome indoor details.

"So long ago as that?" pursued Margaret, when he had made a guess. "Then, we must lose no time. You waste money, my lord. Bid him bring his tallies at once. Where do you keep yours?"

Umfraville found them at last, after turning the whole castle upside down. It was an evening long remembered at Flamford Keep. By comparing the notches on the twin halves of the little split sticks that were the ledgers and account-books of the age, by summoning a few witnesses and asking many shrewd questions, Margaret convincingly proved the stewart a petty tyrant, a waster and a thief.

"He shall hang!" swore Umfraville.

And hanged he was the next morning from the outer battlements, dangling head downward by his ankles till he confessed his sins; after which he was plumped into the moat and towed through its rank green waters round the circuit of the wall.

That he suffered no worse was due to Margaret's intercession. When he was hauled out, he was set to work in the fields, while Margaret assumed his former duties herself.

THEREAFTER life was better ordered in Flamford Keep and happier in Flamford Village. Umfraville went about rubbing his hands. Here was indeed the proper wife for a hard-fighting baron, one whose capable hand would assure him of finding his estate in good order and his banner still flying from the keep when he came home from harrying a neighbor's land.

He rode with her through all his farms, until he was asking her questions about them instead of answering questions from her. He hawked and hunted with her and found her the best of sportsmen. He danced attendance on her every move.

But all this made his impatience no easier to bear. He had long coveted her beauty; now he felt a deep respect for her abilities. He was in a fair way to be deep in love with her. To have her living in his very castle, to eat, talk, ride with her all day and then part with her at the bower door at night was a severer strain than he had put his honesty to in all his life. He found it hard and harder to keep his promise to Bermond.

Then the messenger who had been despatched to London returned with good news. The king had been graciously pleased to forward his petition, with a favorable endorsement, to the Archbishop of York. A few weeks longer and Ranulf de Umfraville would be formally readmitted into the holy fellowship of the church.

"When that trumpet sounds, it shall find me mailed and mounted!" cried the delighted baron. "Ho, Bermond, ride for a priest, and have him here for an early wedding day."

The priest came. The castle chapel was cleared of dust and rubbish and consecrated anew. The holy man took up his abode with them, till word should come that Umfraville might receive the blessed sacrament. But no word came from the archbishop, though week followed week, and Umfraville tore his nails.

As for Margaret, strengthened and comforted by confession and prayer and daring to hope that the two she loved might still be alive and free, she held herself calmly ready for the sacrifice. It was the enforced calm of heroism, but hero's blood coursed in her veins. She had her work and the memory of her lost love. These things must be her comfort in the long, joyless years to come.

Toward the end of August Umfraville began to drink heavily and to vow that the messenger from York must have been waylaid and slain on the road. Sending for the priest, he announced that the wedding must take place, excommunication or no.

"My pardon will be granted sooner or later," he declared. "It will be no sin to anticipate it a little."

But the priest stubbornly refused, and Umfraville fell into a moody anger that soon infected the spirits of the men-at-arms. Soldier-like, they had begun to form friendships and were fast becoming a united company. But now they drew apart into their former factions.

Bermond stalked about with the flame of suspicion in his eyes, savoring treachery. Men wore their mail off duty and kept their knives by them. The air of Flamford Keep grew heavy with threats of mutiny and war.

But on the second evening in September came a peacemaker—a gangling, red-haired youth on a gangling roan, ambling down the dusty road from Monrepaire. His only answer to the sentry's challenge and the questions that followed was a vast grin and a gush of meaningless words in broadest Yorkshire—then a distinct dialect understood by few in the south of England and by none, it chanced, in Flamford Keep.

But all could read the archbishop's crest on his dusty livery and the seal of the scroll he took from his scrip at sight of the Blue Boar banner flying from the topmost turret. And the priest could read the Latin writ fairly on the scroll.

"*Benedicite*, fair son," he said to Umfraville. "Mother Church again receives you to her bosom. After mass tomorrow, if it please you, ye may be wed."

"Be assured that it pleases me, good father," shouted Umfraville.

He was marvelously restored to good-humor.

"Tomorrow—what day is that?"

"It is the feast of St. Simeon," the priest replied.

"It shall be a feast for sinners as well!" roared the baron. "Let a tun of strong ale be broached and a fat ox be roasted. Look to it, my lovely steward."

CHAPTER XIII

DEATH IN THE MURKWOOD

A HARD, scarred animal of a man, marked with two score years of sin and strife, Aymon de Born sat in his chair as if it had been a saddle, straight and nervously vigilant. Wide jowls, a low, heavy-boned forehead and red eyes full of flame bore witness to his wicked soul. All these and the sun-baked face of him proved the aptness of his *nom de guerre*—the Brown Bull.

Robed in sumptuous scarlet, he made the most of his state in the strong fortalice of High Tower. He played the miniature king, surrounded by full-mailed men-at-arms. Above Gislac's old seat, now moved to the daïs, a gorgeous canopy of tarnished cloth-of-gold glimmered in the torchlight. Pomp pleased his savage nature. To him glory meant ostentation; power meant the power to hurt. There was a hint of playful menace in the rough hand that caressed his dagger-hilt. His eyes glinted as they strove to stare down the man before him.

"How know I this is not a trick?" he asked.

His voice rumbled like that of the beast for which he was named.

But the visitor gave him stare for stare, answering with a touch of bravado:

"The earl my master is too great to use tricks now. If he wanted your hide, Brown Bull, he would come and take it."

The baron started to his feet, his dagger half-out. As he moved, three of his men-at-arms started forward. But the soldier who dared thus risk his anger stood his ground, smiling.

"Be prudent, de Born. Richard de Monrepaire lets no man of his suffer hurt unavenged. Think you he sent me here without weighing every chance? Nay, he knows your evil temper."

With a scowl and a gesture to his warriors de Born resumed his seat.

"Earl or no earl," he grumbled, "your master has no right to take such a tone with me. He, Umfraville, and I were all thieves together, till Stephen made him Earl of Ashton and Donnet. Now he lords it over us, commanding us to help him out of all his troubles. Yet if it had not been for us, Richard would never have seen the day when Gislac would not have been a thorn in his flesh.

"Umfraville and I, not the Reiver, cast the outlaw out of High Tower. Well, say your say. But if it is a trick—I know Richard has never forgiven me for my intrigue with the Blue Boar—I shall know how to guard myself."

The man from Monrepaire smiled again.

"There is no trick," he said half-contemptuously, with the arrogance of a vassal who knows himself protected. "What Earl Richard asks of you is to your advantage as well as his. It is your tenants and his who have rebelled. Your fields and his lie spoiling, while the laborers who should be swinging the scythe wield bows in the Murkwood.

"You must help my lord subdue them, or you will go hungry this Winter. If you fear, I promise you that my lord will act honorably. He is powerful enough to forget your treacherous compact with Umfraville."

De Born thought, slowly and painfully.

"Speak on," he said at last.

"Good. My Lord Richard's foresters have pricked the runaway Saxons out of their hiding-places in the forest. They stand at bay, three score in number, on the crest of Lightwood Knoll, which is half-way between Monrepaire and here. Tomorrow morn Earl Richard will go out against them, with thirty riders and four score foresters. His men-at-arms will hold the low ground to the west of the crag, while his bowmen scale the ridge, half to the south and half to the north, where the slope is wooded and less steep. Two score on each side, the foresters will creep through the woods till they come to the edge of the open ground about the foot of Lightwood Knoll.

"There they will wait, till you come up from High Tower with your men-at-arms. You, of course, will complete the circle by closing the eastern side. When you are in position and all escape is cut off from the Saxons, sound your trumpet, and we will all attack at once."

As the man expounded Sir Richard's plan, de Born nodded, ticking off the details on his fingers.

"It is well schemed," he answered, but still frowned. "We shall press home the attack from all four sides at once."

"Not too hotly," the messenger warned him. "You and my lord want laborers, not corpses. And Lightwood Knoll is hard to storm. 'Twould make a rare site for a tower, were there water on the crag. The Saxons will be without water; we need but make a sharp demonstration, that they may see we surround them in force, and they will soon yield."

Again de Born nodded; but suddenly his red eyes flared.

"If there is no treachery—" he began.

Abruptly the soldier cut him off.

"You know my lord meditates no treachery against you. Why, lord baron, if your men and ours were to turn their weapons against each other, would not the Saxons be able to rend us both in pieces?"

"You are right," the Brown Bull answered. "Say to Earl Richard that I will do as he asks. But may I fry with the fiends if some day I do not reward you for your insolence!"

Seeing he had shown his scorn too openly, the messenger muttered a feeble apology, bowed and departed.

THE sun beat warmly on the narrow bridle-path that wound through the Murkwood to the eastward slope of Lightwood Knoll. Out of the shadow, blinking as the full glare smote upon them, rode a troop of horsemen. They advanced at a walk, bits and scabbards jingling.

Before them rode a powerful, swarthy man on a great white gelding. Man and horse were mighty beasts, worth six of the tough men-at-arms and lean mounts that followed. At the leader's heels came his standard-bearer, the Brown Bull of de Born ramping on the pennon.

The baron was helmeted, but his coat of mail was rolled up and tied behind his high-peaked saddle. So had the Conqueror's knights ridden from Hastings camp to Senlac field, doffing their armor for the march to don it for the battle. Such was the custom of the Norman riders, save when there seemed danger of some hidden encounter on the road.

Sure that his runaway tenants were all besieged on Lightwood Knoll, convinced by the logic of facts that Monrepaire meant no evil against him, de Born was glad to ride without mail for another two leagues at least. There was no sense in making himself and his men sweat on a roasting forenoon. But when they should halt within range of the knoll——

The drowsy quiet was abruptly shattered by the chuck of metal on wood, a rending crack, a rushing and swishing through the air behind. De Born turned in his saddle and looked alertly to the rear. He saw a splendid beech that had but now overhung the path come sweeping down like a draw-bridge and fall crashing across the way less than a lance-length behind his rearmost riders. A second later the road before him was choked by the fallen top of a mighty elm. The Brown Bull was penned!

"Loose!" cried a deep, clear voice from the solid wall of greenery to his right.

Up from the ground and out from behind moss-green tree-boles leaped a line of shock-headed men, bare of chest, bent long-bows drawn to the ear. Forty bow-strings twanged as one. A storm of shafts swept the crowded path, hissing like a tempest of hail.

Caught helpless, unmailed, de Born's Normans reeled before the blast. Long shafts tore through their unprotected breasts, stung their horses to frenzy. Many a man rolled dead from the saddle before he could wheel or so much as draw his sword.

Some, dying, were crushed beneath fallen horses; others were trampled by wounded, maddened chargers that stampeded blindly up and down the road. Those left unscathed drove their mounts in vain at the steep crumbling clay bank that bounded the path on the left.

But de Born was with them, fierce veteran of a hundred fights. By some miracle he had escaped the torrent of arrows. His red eyes roved from front to rear and back. There was no time to form line to the right nor room to get up pace for a charge. Whatever could be done must be done afoot and before the unceasing flights of barbed shafts struck down the rest.

"Dismount!" the Brown Bull bellowed. "Raoul, take four men, cut through the branches of that fallen beech and get the horses past it to the rear. You others, up shields and follow me!"

Straight into the teeth of the arrow-storm strode the Brown Bull. His head was bent down, showing only the sloping crown of his helmet. Shaft after shaft glanced from it or struck in the broad, kite-shaped shield that guarded his body well. Behind him surged a scattered group of a dozen dismounted men-at-arms, hampered by their long spears and trailing scabbards as they came on doggedly against the line of archers.

Once at close grips their heavy blades and trained arms would soon make havoc of the half-naked Saxon serfs, who beside their bows had only clubs and knives.

The Saxons knew that danger well. A bow is a poor weapon in a scrimmage. Closer pressed the angry Normans. The peasants had no choice but to fall back, their last volleys flying wildly. Exultantly de Born shouted his battle-cry.

Like an answering trumpet, a second cry pealed to meet it—

"Monrepaire!"

FROM among the Saxons sprang a tall, blue-eyed young warrior, bare-breasted like his comrades but armed with a flashing Norman sword. His long yellow hair streamed behind him as he charged, full at de Born. The Baron raised his red gaze to meet him, just as a tremendous sword-stroke tore the Brown Bull's shield in two.

Hurling the fragments from him, de Born launched a furious blow at the young man's broad white breast. Expecting an awkward defense, he was astounded to meet a skilful parry that sent painful thrills along his elbow.

Before the baron could recover, a back-stroke almost tore through his helmet, so that he bent beneath the shock. It was then that his eyes first clearly saw his adversary's face. It was Geoffrey de Monrepaire.

But de Born was of stern stuff. Mastering his surprize, he slashed at his opponent's bare left side. Geoffrey sprang nimbly back; then, an instant after the Norman point had whistled harmlessly past, he leaped in and struck with all his strength at the base of the baron's neck.

The Brown Bull fell, spouting blood; his helmeted head rolled far across the glade. Dizzy with horror at his first man-slaying, the boy staggered back among the trees.

A great body hurtled past him in a gleam of steel. It drove full among de Born's leaderless men, hacking and thrusting. One stroke, and a man-at-arms toppled from the path. A second, and the handful of Normans left alive at the van threw down their arms. The champion who had daunted them dashed past them to their rear and flung himself on the man Raoul, who recognized him and gave back with a cry. It was Gislac.

The fierce old swordsman struck Raoul from his path even as the rallying Saxons flung themselves on the remnant of their foes. The handful under Raoul, giving up their frantic labor at the fallen beech, cried piteously for mercy.

"Spare them!" cried Geoffrey, and Gislac echoed his command.

But it needed more than mere words to stay the vengeance of the serfs on those who had so often burned Saxon homes and reddened their hands in Saxon blood. The two nobles must strike hard blows with the flat of their swords before they could drag off their allies and form them in a scowling circle about the six sore-battered survivors of the Brown Bull's command.

Turning to the prisoners, Gislac demanded—

"What has de Born done with those men of mine who follow him?"

There was no answer. Gislac turned fiercely on the wounded Raoul.

"Speak and speak truly, else I will let these Saxons work their will on you."

Raoul's lips were pressed together in grim silence; but another of the captives, less bold to face Saxon knives, answered for him:

"My lord, de Born sent your former followers to hold his castle in the hills. He dared not trust them in High Tower, where every sight and act would make them think of you. Nor would he have dared use them today, against your Saxon tenants."

"So!" said Sir Giles. "Even this was the tale brought to me. Would ye see him who bore the tale?"

He spoke to the nearest Saxon, who disappeared into the thicket and came back supporting a sorely wounded man-at-arms.

Raoul cursed bitterly.

"Why, this is he who brought word to my lord from Earl Richard last night!" he cried.

Gislac nodded.

"His way led through the Murkwood, and there he fell into our hands. Seeing how little hope there was of his master's help just then, he was persuaded to tell us of today's attempt against us. The Rotten Reiver was in error. We were not all entrenched on Lightwood Knoll; nor does he know what leaders these peasants have.

"I think his own plans will turn against him. As for you, ye shall be well guarded and set free in time. Ho, Witta! Fetch me de Born's trumpet. I have a rare note to play today."

"BEFORE GOD, de Born tarries long! I like it ill, John; the less that my messenger came not back last night. There must be a few prowling Saxons left loose in the Murkwood."

Sir Richard's handsome face was troubled. But his anxiety was as nothing to that of the dark-featured soldier by his side. They spoke in hushed whispers, as men in ambush must.

"Nay, my lord earl, it was no Saxon slew Red Roger. Your foresters swore the serfs were in full force yonder on the knoll. I fear me the White Lady stole him away."

The soldier shuddered and crossed himself.

Richard de Monrepaire smiled sickly.

"The White Lady?" he gibed. "I know her not."

"All else do," answered Black John. "Night after night have we heard her from the walls. She wails as no mortal woman wails. It turns the blood cold in our veins. When I have sent men out to find what she is, they come back with a tale of a white form that flits away and vanishes before their eyes.

"Oh, my lord, much have we sinned, we of Monrepaire! I fear she is some ghost hot from hell to wreak vengeance on us. Either that or one of the elf-women, who lure men to death. Last night she howled dolorously. It is an ill omen for today. And de Born comes not."

"Be silent!" the Reiver ordered angrily.

Unrepentant rogue that he was, he could not shake off the awe of his captain's words. He, too, had heard the wailing outside his walls. He had seen a dim white figure of nights, vanishing in the enfolding dark.

A trumpet shrilled, thin and clear, to the east.

"De Born at last!" the earl cried. "Forward all!"

It was two hours past noon. Monrepaire's own trumpet answered that of his ally. Instantly the two bodies of his archers advanced to the edge of the woods on either side of a great rocky knoll, where they stood shouting and loosing arrows at the rude ramparts raised by Saxon hands about the top of the crag.

All moved according to plan. It was time de Born's horsemen struck from the east. Eagerly Richard gazed for the first flash of mail.

It came, heralding armed horsemen beneath de Born's banner. The riders in full mail deployed in open order. As they did so, Richard de Monrepaire cried out in surprized alarm. With the horsemen was a mob of Saxons, armed with long Norman swords and shields!

Even as the Reiver stared at them, the foremost horseman threw down the Brown Bull's banner and trampled it under foot. The advancing riders broke into a trot, from the trot into a gallop, and charged down in awful splendor. Before Sir Richard could so much as shout an order, they struck his foresters on the flank, crumpling his long thin lines.

Formed and armed to fight against unmounted serfs, the archers of Monrepaire knew not how to face horse. Dumfounded to see what they took for de Born's men-at-arms siding with Saxon peasants, they had neither wits nor time to change front or to count their foes.

Driven back along the edge of the woods they were cut down from behind or forced out into the open, where they made perfect targets for Godulf's thirty Saxon archers atop Lightwood Knoll. Their green jerkins were for forest wear and marked them sharply against the light of the treeless plain.

Some turned and fled back through the

forest by the way they had come that morning. But the greater part were driven out on the bare rock at the foot of the knoll and back to the steep cliff-like slope that here formed the western side of the ridge. Above it rose the knoll itself, like a tower on a wall.

Here they had a brief respite. A zigzag path ran up the face of the cliff, branching near the top to reach the summit of the ridge on either side of the knoll. By this path the two detachments of foresters were in touch with each other and the men-at-arms of Monrepaire below, while the pursuers, obliged to account for both detachments, were now divided into two bodies, with the whole mass of the knoll between them. Moreover, the overhang of the knoll protected the foresters from Godulf's arrow-flights.

Never had Sir Richard meant that his thirty dismounted men-at-arms should scale this path so long as any sort of enemy held the top. He had planned on a bloodless victory, on frightening waterless knaves into submission. But the sight of their own comrades being driven to the edge of the precipice was too much for hot Norman blood to endure. Led by Black John, their captain, they pressed up the slope, guarding their heads with upraised shields.

They were up too far to withdraw easily, clambering with straining sinews, when suddenly from the crest of the knoll great round rocks came thundering down upon them. Since dawn the Saxon boys and women, toiling side by side with Godulf's thirty men, had been collecting those stones against this very time.

Herein, too late, the Rotten Reiver recognized a generalship greater than any serf could boast, greater than his own. Too late he understood the cunning with which half the peasant force, unknown to him, had been withdrawn from the knoll before his arrival to fall upon de Born, arm its Saxons with his captured weapons, mount half its force with the chargers of the Brown Bull.

And now, even while he cursed and shouted vain orders, those Saxon women and boys aided their men to launch destruction on his men-at-arms, to toil at the levers, to pry away and launch whole cornices of cracked and overhanging rock. Beneath that avalanche of granite men-at-arms and foresters, shields, helmets, steel-clad bodies—all were crushed and swept utterly away. Those of the Reiver's bowmen who escaped this fate found themselves caught in a terrible sally and flung flying down the wrecked path, pursued by the arrows of the Saxon archers who thronged eagerly to the edge of the cliff.

ONCE more the peasant horsemen swept in to make an end of the shattered Normans. Himself striving with voice and hand to rally those left to him, the Rotten Reiver turned to meet the charge. Thirty-three foresters and fourteen men-at-arms were all he could oppose to the advance. But he brought them into battle-array with brilliant swiftness, archers on wings and rear. Defeat and death threatened him as never before. He flouted them with a keen-eyed courage that watched for the slightest advantage.

He found his advantage, but too late to use it. Foremost among his enemies rode two men well armed and strongly made, men who managed their beasts and bore themselves like Normans. On the body of the one he recognized de Born's splendid armor, the other was accoutered like a man-at-arms. Save for these two, the rest, though well equipped with the spoil of the Brown Bull, rode ill and strung out and brandished their weapons wildly like the Saxon serfs they were. When they closed with him, Sir Richard knew the first two would bore deep. The rest, flung back like waves from a cliff, would break. But they did not close.

Seeing how quickly and well the Reiver had rallied, Gislac ordered a halt. Unwillingly, in confusion, the peasants obeyed. Geoffrey, burning to bring the battle to an issue, would have spurred on, but his own good sense bidding him heed his friend's command, he reined in three spear-lengths in advance of the rest and trotted slowly back. Scarcely could he believe that his uncle had not recognized him, but he knew not how Racul's plundered helmet with its deep nasal had concealed his face.

For the first time in his life Richard de Monrepaire retreated, and he retreated in good order, ready to turn and sting. The score of men too badly wounded to fight were lifted into the saddles of the spare horses. Slowly at first, then more and more rapidly, he withdrew.

From mid-afternoon till dusk the beaten

Normans struggled on down the twisting bridle-path that joined the main road a scant league from Monrepaire. First rode the men-at-arms, followed by the wounded. The foresters under the earl himself closed the rear. There was the post of honor and of danger, for the pursuers pressed them hard, hoping to close and strike when flight should have laid them open to direct attack.

The Saxon archers, of whom Godulf's thirty were fresh and unwearied, ran full career after them, pausing to aim and loose, and taking up the pursuit again. Their quivers were full of captured arrows, while Richard's men were down to their last three or four shafts apiece.

Whenever the earl halted and formed his line in a good place for a stand, the Saxons worked round his flank and forced him out of it in a way that showed them commanded by one cunning in war.

The Reiver knew his unknown adversary was not de Born. Had he not seen him trample the Bull's banner? Had he not seen with a soldier's eye that, save two, the hostile riders were mailed Saxons? And that these Saxons were mailed meant only that they had despoiled and slain de Born.

Gislac he suspected not, for Gislac must be far away, else he would have long since fallen into the hands of Richard's spies. That his enemy was unknown troubled him. He could not guess the limits of his cunning.

If the unknown foe had had the wit to surprize both de Born and Richard, there was no telling how far his prevision might have gone. He might have managed to lay an ambush to cut off the Reiver's retreat. So Richard ordered Black John, wounded but still daring, to push on with the thirteen men-at-arms to guard the point where the bridle-path debouched into the road.

This was the more needful in that the growing dark might have permitted a few of the mounted pursuers to turn down some dark forest-aisle unobserved, dash past the fugitives on a parallel, hidden course and halt the withdrawal.

"Courage, lads!" the Reiver exhorted his foresters.

They were now reduced to a scant score, what with their tally of wounded with the men-at-arms and those riddled with arrows in the flight.

"A few furlongs more and we shall be on the highroad, where lawless serfs dare not follow. Soon it will be too dark for their arrows. Take heart!"

The long Summer twilight was already blending into night; the sun had left not one red streamer above the horizon, yet a weird, pale afterglow shone through the lower branches of the Murkwood. The eery light touched the beaten men's minds with those fearsome tales of ghosts and demons that haunted the forest depths.

They pressed on, chin over shoulder, more fearful of the dread things of the wood than of the now lagging pursuit. There was no sound save the melancholy clank of their stained armor and the groans and curses of the wounded.

Of a sudden, piercing their superstitious fears, came a scream of mortal terror. It rang through the forest dusk ahead, so shrill, so mad with fright that the boldest ruffian of them all turned cold.

"Black John's voice!" gasped a limping spearman. "God! What could so frighten such as he?"

Shriek after shriek tore through the wood, the franctic yells of a dozen agonized souls. Hoof beats thundered back up the path. As well as they might, the wounded dragged themselves to one side or forced their horses into crackling undergrowth to let the wild hunt go by. The earl himself, cursing with white lips, drove his scared foresters to the front to face the coming terror.

But it was his own captain, Black John, galloping toward them with his men-at-arms in a frenzied rout behind. Helmetless, his shield lost, his dark face faded to a horrible mottled gray, he flogged his horse with the flat of his sword till it shared his panic.

Heedless of his lord or any other mortal man, he rode straight into and through the foresters, trampled three wounded men beneath his horse's hoofs and disappeared toward the pursuing enemy. Shouts and the twang of bowstrings proved he had found them.

Hard on his heels pounded the troopers, like him less afraid of the foe than of the terror that followed. Blind with fear, half of them failed to mark the turns of the path and shot crashing off at random through the forest. The horses fled as chargers will once they realize—and it does not take long—that their riders are afraid.

But what could cause their panic? The

Reiver, bold as he was, shuddered at the unguessed horror that could so harry Black John and his callous fellow veterans. Such as they feared no living man.

For a moment forgetful of pursuit, Monrepaire and his foresters stood still, gazing tremblingly down the path toward the road, fearfully fascinated, expectant of—they neither knew nor dared think what.

At last they saw—a single horseman, bareheaded, riding toward them at a foot pace. The hoofs of his mount made no sound on the soft turf of the woodland path. He came ghostly to meet them. The horse was white; the rider was white, with the awful pallor of death. Nay, he was whiter, the color of a shroud. Armor, weapons, all were white; his face glimmered, unearthly, in the gloom.

Closer he came, very close. And still the Reiver stood his ground, though the hair rose on the back of his neck. Watching, he felt his heart grow cold. A scream died on his lips. By the last dim light, as the dark enveloped all, he recognized his murdered nephew, Geoffrey de Monrepaire.

CHAPTER XIV

THE WHITE LADY

FOR one grisly moment the spell of terror held them. Not a man there but could swear to Geoffrey's death; not one, save Monrepaire alone, who had not believed their attack on High Tower to be revenge for their master's slaughtered nephew.

Wounded or hale, they all stood shivering while a man might count ten. Then all who could use legs or mount a horse fled blindly into the black forest. Only the helpless remained, and they lay prostrate or knelt, trying to cross themselves or touch hidden relic with fingers that shook or babbled half-forgotten prayers.

Richard de Monrepaire was at last alone with his soul. Fearless, scornful, remorseless man that he was, he had hitherto known repentance only when facing his Maker in prayer, nor had the terrors of hell power to swerve him from his course.

But now, face to face with one he knew dead by his plots, guilt allied itself with fear, dethroning reason. The shock unmanned his will. A horrible certainty took possession of him. This was indeed Geoffrey's avenging spirit, come to bear his murderer's soul to judgment and eternal torment.

But, though his flesh crawled, the Reiver thought not once of flight. He was the Monrepaire, who had never faltered for danger, never shrunk from death. Knowing himself doomed and damned beyond hope, he was yet too brave a man for shame. His time was come. Well, he would meet it sword in hand. His will whipping his recreant flesh, he charged with uplifted sword straight at the ghostly horseman.

As they met, he struck with all his strength. But the white horse swerved to let him pass. The pallid rider caught the blow on his spectral shield. A great joy flooded the Reiver's veins, for he felt the impact of his blade on good solid leather and brass and linden-wood, and he knew his foe was a living man. For had this been a ghost, the sword would have passed through shield and rider as through unyielding air.

Carried two spear-lengths past by the impetus of his charge, the earl reined in his mount and turned. Wild yells dinned in his ears; a host of half-seen figures danced where he had but now ridden. The path was filled with armed Saxons and their wounded prisoners. Through the throng came striding a mighty figure in Norman mail, unhelmeted—Giles de Gislac. Torches of pine, waved through the air till they flamed, fell full on his face as Richard looked.

Gislac! The sight of his ancient enemy restored all the Reiver's poise and told much to his nimble brain. Geoffrey alive! Gislac with him! Of a surety the boy had been but wounded; Gislac had found him, nursed him back to life in High Tower, smuggled him thence after the siege to some safe hiding-place. Then they must have fled into the Murkwood, organized the revolted serfs, intercepted the messenger on his way from de Born to Monrepaire and skilfully turned the Reiver's own plans to his destruction.

Shield up, sword ready, Richard de Monrepaire waited for a hand to be laid on him. He saw the peasants move toward him, hate in their eyes. He saw Gislac's upifted arm warn them away. The old Norman's sense of fair play called for the arbitrament by duel, for now Geoffrey, turning his horse, spurred toward his kinsman.

The Reiver's eye was caught by a white smear on his own sword-blade. He touched it. Clay! It was that which had whitened the boy's face, his armor. The white horse—why, it was the gelding de Born was wont to ride!

His fear gone, his danger no supernatural one, his cunning came back to him. He might still escape. Gislac and the peasants waited to let Geoffrey take his own revenge. Back behind the strong walls of Monrepaire he might defy them all forever. But he must make haste. Geoffrey was fairly on him, crying:

"Yield! You are my prisoner!"

"Not yet!" Sir Richard cried, driving home the spurs.

His fleet roan bounded away in a magnificent leap and settled down to a swinging stride. A brace of peasants barred the way, gripping their weapons.

The earl's sword flashed twice, and the path was clear. Soon the roan's hoofs thundered on the paved road. He turned westward toward his own castle, less than a league away.

Behind him drummed the steady beat of pursuit—a single horse, gaining, gaining. He plied the spurs pitilessly; still the beating hoofs behind gained volume. Well he knew the fleetness of de Born's great gelding, but his own horse should outdistance any foaled in the South.

Furious, he struck his beast with his open hand. His fingers came away sticky with blood. Again he felt. An arrow thrust its feathered end from the roan's wet flesh. Long before he could reach the river, his nephew would be close enough to strike.

He thought to turn and fight, but then he might lose time and Gislac ride up and overtake him. He knew himself no match for his enemy. His shoulder was still stiff with the wound Sir Giles had given him at High Tower.

Yet, if he did not turn, he must be cut down from behind; if he fought, he might overcome and kill Geoffrey and escape to High Tower on the boy's swift, unwounded steed.

Ah, let de Gislac try to storm his walls! The handful of sturdy rascals he had left there could hold it while a messenger sped to Flamford for Umfraville's help.

Yes, he must make peace with Umfraville. The Blue Boar, with Margaret for a hostage, could soon force Gislac to make terms. He would promise Umfraville High Tower, now that de Born was dead. Umfraville would be glad of that. Flamford Keep was so far from the tower that he could not hope to hold it without Monrepaire's good-will. Another ten strides and he had formed his plan and put it into execution. First, he must escape. To do that, he must kill Geoffrey. The rest followed.

Swerving to the right, the earl turned up a little-used by-path. Geoffrey was close but was almost deceived in the dark.

His gelding shot past the opening and he lost much ground before he could return and follow. But he knew the paths as well as the Reiver, and this way was familiar to him.

It led to a deep tarn where uncle and nephew, in the old days, had often stopped to refresh their horses on the return from a day's hawking. Within a mile of the castle it was yet surrounded by dense thickets, which only this one path pierced. Goeffrey slackened speed, riding slowly and alertly. The traitor could not escape him now.

EMERGING into the clear glade about the tarn, he saw the Reiver sitting his mare, facing him, across the almost circular pool. The moon was just rising, a silver disk, and the English night would not be truly dark till much later. Monrepaire and his steed seemed an equestrian statue, so motionless they were beside the star-mirroring tarn.

"Do you come to kill me, who have been a father to you?"

Sir Richard's voice was vibrant with a sad and solemn richness. There seemed no guile in it—nothing but reproach.

"My neck still bears the scars of your hired daggers," Geoffrey answered with a quiet calm that was more terrible than hate.

"Ah, my nephew, never!"

The earl spoke passionately, the words trembling with his seeming earnestness.

"Some unknown ruffian struck you down, some skulking forest outlaw whose name no man knows."

"Odo!" cried a ringing voice from the path, a voice the Reiver knew for Gislac's.

He was come, then. The earl must fight two now and live if he could.

"Odo!" the voice cried again, repeating the name of him who had attempted murder for his treacherous master.

And wierdly, in tones that seemed to wail from the pool itself, something echoed:

"Odo! Odo!"

It was a voice murmuring, broken, like that of a woman moaning in unutterable sorrow.

"What was that?" the boy exclaimed.

Sir Richard once more felt the hairs of his neck rise. Often had he heard that moan by night and heard it wailing under his walls, and rising to look forth, had often seen a white form flitting back and forth toward the edge of the forest. It was the voice that had set his sentinels to huddling together like frightened children in the dead watches of the dark.

Furtively the Reiver glanced about him; but the only white figure there was his nephew on the far side of the tarn. He must finish the matter swiftly, before the peasants came up and cut him off from the castle. First Geoffrey, then Gislac.

"Give me my life and freedom, lad," he pleaded in the tones of a weary, defeated old man. "Give me but those. I will yield to you, now and forever, my earldom and my sword."

For a moment Geoffrey did not speak; then:

"Much as you have betrayed me, cruelly though you have wronged me," he answered, "I will grant you what you ask. You are of my blood; I will try to forgive. Come, we will ride back with Sir Giles. I will vouch for your safety."

"I come," the Reiver promised most submissively.

He held out his sword, hilt foremost, in his right hand. His left clutched his dagger, its blade hidden by his broad leather reins, its point quivering to be plunged into the young fool's throat. Ah, when Geoffrey should be near enough to reach out for the sword! One stroke, swift and sure! To approach at the best angle for the thrust, Monrepaire turned, to make the circuit of the tarn.

The shadow of a clump of dense trees overhung that side of the pool. As he stepped into the shadow, something white leaped out at him. A slender figure, robed in torn white garments, its long hair streaming, it came close with staring eyes.

The earl pulled back in fright.

"The White Lady!" he gasped.

His face, turned full to hers, caught the silver ray of the moon. At sight of it, the woman shrieked in a scream that was half a sob—

"Odo!"

She sprang upon the Reiver, her wasted features writhing with hate. Her outstretched arms clutched at him, closed around him. Frozen with surprize and superstitious fear, neither he nor Geoffrey could think of her as aught but one of those elf-women whom all believed to haunt the Murkwood and drag benighted horsemen from their saddles.

Then, as he felt her grip on his thigh and saw her face looking up into his, Sir Richard suddenly knew her. She was Arlotta, the faithless maid whose help had aided Odo to strike his murderous blow at Geoffrey. Driven forth by Gislac, crazed by her grief for her lost lover whom the Reiver had slain to conceal his own guilt, she must have hidden in the wood by day and haunted by night those walls from which Odo had been hurled to his death.

All this Sir Richard knew in a flash, understanding also that in some mad way she felt his part in her lover's doom. But it availed him little. His roan, startled by her swift approach, shied violently on the very brink of the pool. Vainly the earl strove to control his mount with voice and knees, then dropped both sword and dagger to grasp the reins.

Rearing and toppling, the group swayed for a moment on the crumbling bank. Then the earth gave way. With a three-fold scream, they fell together. Even as Geoffrey rode toward them, they disappeared forever in the deep waters of the tarn.

CHAPTER XV

ST. SIMEON'S FEAST

THE sentinel above the gate of Flamford Keep started from sleep, rubbed his eyes and gazed furtively about to see if any had observed his lapse from duty. The sound that had torn through his dreams pierced the air incessantly, waxing, waning and waxing again with even regularity—the strident squeak of ungreased axles down the road. Nearer it came, swelling in discordant volume.

It stopped. Some one hallooed from the gate. The sentry looked down.

"Who comes?" he challenged, his hail closing in a smothered yawn.

A rustic voice answered him:

"Will o' the Wood and a wagon-load of fagots, brought by my lady's orders to roast the ox for her wedding feast. Open, good sir, and let us in."

His tones reassured the sentry, even more than did the squeal of his harmless peasant's cart. The woodman was Umfraville's tenant, well known.

"Ply your goad, good Will," the sentry laughed, leaning his pike against the rampart.

Stumbling down the winding stairs to the guard-room, he roused three of the snorers, whose ears the stout walls had protected from the squeal of the wain, and led the grumbling varlets out into the dark cavern of the archway. Together they wound up the portcullis, let down the draw-bridge, unbolted and swung back the massive gates. The slow dawn was crisp with the cold of early September. Its first light showed the heavy wain approaching the moat.

Heaped high with bundles of fagots, it was tugged across the bridge by two yokes of stunted oxen, whose sides Will o' the Wood prodded vehemently, cursing in gutteral Saxon. Beside the wizened little drover walked another peasant—a tall, big-shouldered youth in a long smock-frock, who carried an ox-goad in his hand. The men-at-arms looked long and suspiciously at him, for he was taller and better built than any peasant of Flamford Village. At the sentinel's nod one stepped forward to bar the young man's way with his pike.

"Who art thou, lout?" he growled.

"Monrepaire!"

As he shouted the word, the youth struck the Norman senseless with one blow of the heavy goad.

"Monrepaire! To me, lads!"

The bundles of fagots heaved in the wain, rose and tumbled over its high side. From under the flying wood sprang a dozen men who had hidden there dirty, disheveled, fierce of face. In a trice they seized and pinioned the astounded men-at-arms. One plucky Norman managed to throw off the ratchet of the portcullis windlass even as strong hands laid hold of him. Down whirled the spiked iron grating, but the high, stout sides of the wagon caught and held it a man's height above the ground.

The wain's rear wheels, thick disks of solid wood, still rested on the draw-bridge and prevented its being raised; while the pole, projecting across the threshold, forbade the closing of the gates.

Casting the peasant's frock aside, Geoffrey de Monrepaire stood in full mail under the dark archway. Severing the traces with his sword, he drove the oxen ahead of him into the courtyard, Witta and the handful of picked men from the wagon following to seize the unprepared half-dozen soldiers in gateway and guard-room.

Swift and handy as they were, swords were out and clashing before they finished. The clang of steel and clatter of tongues re-echoed from wall to wall; shouts and running feet answered. From the topmost tower came the brazen, swaying clamor of the great alarum-bell. A trumpet pealed. Out of the barrack doors poured streams of half-naked, half-awakened men, clapping on helmets and buckling sword-belts as they ran toward the castle gate.

But Geoffrey's peasants had now secured their captives. He cried an order. Straightway the Saxons formed a double line across the inward end of the deep, narrow gateway, six pikemen kneeling in the front rank, six archers standing behind them, bows bent and twanging.

Long shafts whistled across the courtyard, plumping pointblank into the bodies of the startled, unorganized garrison. Five fell on the bloody floor; the rest broke and streamed back for their shields and coats of mail.

"One of Gislac's," Geoffrey muttered. "A pity, poor fellow!"

A deep voice roared from the bowels of the castle. All at once the garrison swarmed out again, armed, armored, hot with wrath. Umfraville and his officers came from the keep, swiftly marshaling the men-at-arms into a compact wedge, backed by a long, heavy column. Geoffrey, his head now covered by his peaked helmet with its disguising nasal, ran his eyes up and down the formidable array.

He knew its brutal impact could sweep his little company headlong through the gate. As he watched them take order under the Blue Boar's skilful handling, he saw many a soldierly figure whose bearing spoke of Gislac's training, and his heart was heavy.

"Hold your ground!" he exhorted his Saxons. "Quick, Witta! Up with the portcullis! Our comrades come."

Across the drawbridge clattered nigh a hundred peasants, Godulf brandishing a heavy ax in the van. A rustling field of wheat beyond the river told where they had lain hidden. Scarce had the portcullis been lifted clear when their onrush struck the ponderous wagon with irresistible force and drove it straight on through.

It scattered Geoffrey's band to right and left, rolled into the courtyard at the head of a shouting throng, swung broadside to and tipped over on its back with all four wheels in the air. Dammed up behind this obstacle, the newcomers scrambled on top of it or spread out on either side.

Thus confronted, Umfraville briskly brought his column into line. He roared along their front, bidding them strike hard and roll the rabble before them. The line stirred, rippled, moved forward.

BUT before they could gather way, the drawbridge clanged with the hoofs of many riders. Up from the village, over bridge, through the open gate poured a troop of mailed and mounted Normans, riding as only veterans can. Before them bounded a mighty charger, backed by an enormous figure of a man. His battle-cry pealed back from wall to wall:

"Gislac! Gislac!"

To avoid riding down their Saxon allies or crashing into the overturned wain, the head of the charging column turned smartly to the right and began a circuit of the whole great courtyard. Around the square they thundered, encircling the deserted donjon and bearing down on the garrison's rear, two score trained horsemen beneath a blue banner that bore an eagle on a golden tower.

Not another blow was struck, for none was needed. At their leader's cry those in Umfraville's rank who had served Gislac in the old days broke from the line, shouting with eager joy:

"Gislac! Gislac! St. Mary for High Tower!"

Sir Giles threw down his helmet, and his proud face wore a smile of triumph.

Girt in between forty horsemen and the multitude of peasants, deserted by their own best fighting men, Umfraville's ranks broke up and melted away. The thirty-odd ruffians left to him slunk within the depths of the castle or flung down their spears.

Left alone, the Blue Boar waited not on the victor's pleasure. He fled across the court in great bounds, Geoffrey at his heels with thirsty sword. A hair's breadth before its point Umfraville and three others reached the door of the donjon-keep in time to slam it and bar it in the faces of his foes.

"An ax!" shouted Geoffrey, and Witta's massive blade smote deep into the wood.

Four peasants bore the tongue of the up-tilted wagon at top speed and drove it smashing against the timbers. Ax and ram were plying in busy din when a trumpet sounded a parley from above.

At Geoffrey's order the attack ceased. Together with Sir Giles he stepped back within view of the battlements. Umfraville's angry face looked own upon them.

"Hold your hand, Gislac!" he shouted warningly. "Your daughter is in my hands!"

"And you in ours!" Gislac retorted. "Be prudent, Umfraville. Here stands a young hot-spur whose blade lusts for your life."

The Blue Boar grinned wryly.

"You have won the bailey but not the keep," he reminded them. "Hold back your men, as you love your daughter's life. Begone while you may, ere de Born and Monrepaire come down upon you."

A great roar of derisive laughter went up from the men in the courtyard.

"To me, Raimond!" Sir Giles shouted.

A Norman spearman clattered up and at a word from his master drew forth from his saddle-bag a touzled square of cloth. Slowly with arrogant pride he unfolded it, shook it out and handed it to Gislac. The baron flung it wide. It was a banner—a tower, sable, on a silver field. Umfraville gasped his consternation.

"The Reiver's banner!" Sir Giles exulted. "Aye, look well, Blue Boar. Monrepaire and de Born lie dead in the Murkwood with most of their men to bear them silent company. In one day we overthrow them; none but Black John, Sir Richard's captain, won through us all, though sore wounded.

"For a day he held the castle against us, till Father Ambrose, the Reiver's evil-hearted chaplain, lost heart and persuaded the few defenders to open the gates. Even as we entered, Black John stabbed the priest and slew himself. It will be well for you to yield, since resistance must end in death."

As he spoke, Bermond plucked at his arm and whispered in his ear. As Gislac listened, his eyes gleamed.

"This man has spoken a good word for you," he resumed. "He says that you have treated my daughter kindly, with all honor.

Submit now, Umfraville, and we will make you easy terms."

As he finished speaking, he caught the eye of Geoffrey, who gestured assent and sheathed his sword.

"You came at an ill hour, in the devil's name," Umfraville snarled back. "A few hours more and your daughter would have been my wife. Nay, by the saints! She shall be yet! Hold the door, fellows! Flamard, fetch the priest."

Geoffrey leaped forward.

"Sound the attack!" he cried to Gislac. "What use to win all else, if we lose her?"

With an answering shout the besiegers clashed their weapons. They surged about the door of the keep; axes were raised once more. Suddenly mailed feet rang on the stair, a hand fumbled at the bars within and the massive door flew open. Through it stumbled a lean, gangling red-haired youth, white with terror, a javelin dashing against the stone at his heels.

"Up, fellows!" Gislac cried; and "Treachery!" bellowed the voice of Umfraville.

Before the words died, Geoffrey sprang up the ill-defended stair, a multitude following him. But the Yorkshire lad flung himself at Gislac's feet, anchoring him fast, imploring protection.

"Why, this is the archbishop's messenger, whom we overtook on the road two nights ago!" the baron exclaimed. "Thou hast done well what we commanded thee."

"Even so, if it please you, good my lord," the Northerner stammered.

He spoke now in good Midlands, such as all men understood.

"Last night I flung down the writing as you bade me, and now I have opened the door. Where is the gold you promised?"

"You shall have it within the hour," Gislac assured him. "Now let me go."

Tearing himself free, he ran up the stair of the keep and out upon the battlements.

Umfraville stood, back to the parapet, hemmed in by his enemies. The tower was packed with angry men, shimmered with drawn blades. The three men-at-arms who had fled hither with the Boar were prisoners.

BUT Gislac's eyes were held by Umfraville and the two nearest him. The Blue Boar stood at bay, his eyes hot with fury, one arm encircling Margaret's waist. His free hand held a knife. The girl was pale, but she looked at Geoffrey steadily, smilingly.

His drawn sword quivering in his hand, Geoffrey de Monrepaire confronted his enemy. He had but to strike. One thrust, and the Boar would fall. But the dagger in Umfraville's grasp had its sharp point resting on Margaret's breast. At one side the half-circle of Saxons and men-at-arms jostling him, stood the frightened priest.

While a man might count twice a hundred, they stood so, deadlocked. Abruptly, with a sob that wrenched his bosom, Umfraville dashed his dagger to the floor.

"Ah, God!" he cried. "I can not hurt her. I love her, Gislac. Have mercy on a man sore-pressed!"

For one moment Sir Giles could not forbear exulting.

"Heaven fought for us, Umfraville," he triumphed, "as soon or late it ever fights for the right. You had no chance. Our road crossed that of the archbishop's messenger, whom we bought with gold captured from de Born. Last night he threw down to us a writing which said that your watch was relaxed and your guards drinking heavily in honor of your coming marriage. Today he fulfilled the rest of our orders. We knew how to enter your gate; but a trusty friend within the walls was needed to throw your keep open to us. You have played an unlucky game, Umfraville, but you have played it boldly."

Geoffrey, his sword sheathed, knelt at Margaret's feet. The color flooding back into her cheeks, she gazed upon him with fond joy. Stooping, she whispered softly to him. He rose and turned toward Umfraville. But the Blue Boar arrested him with a gesture. He began to speak, proudly, with a new dignity:

"Gislac, you made terms with me once, for your life and the lives of all under your roof. By those terms you promised me your daughter and half your following. Your men-at-arms went over to you as soon as they heard your war-cry. Now you take back your daughter, who was to be my wife. Is it thus Giles de Gislac keeps his word?"

It was Geoffrey who answered.

"Sir Giles breaks no promises, sir. The tables are turned, that is all. He made certain concessions to you, under duress; now you, under the same compulsion, must make concessions to us.

"Moreover, Sir Giles has in all things

dealt honorably with you. Never, till we slew de Born, did we approach those men-at-arms whom Sir Giles had yielded to him or let them know we still lived. After the Brown Bull's death we did indeed go to his castle and reveal ourselves to them. They could follow us honorably then, having been released by their master's death.

"Nor did we ask these men of yours to join us. But when they saw Sir Giles ride into your bailey with their own old comrades, they acted for themselves. They are free men, serving for wages; they can choose masters as they will. We are clear of dishonor.

"As for the Lady Margaret—I give you my word not to interfere between her and you. Let her choose, as she will."

Umfraville's eyes sought Margaret's and sank before the sentence they read there. But she stepped between him and her father, the tears gathering to fall.

"Nay, how can I choose?" she asked softly, "save to say that my heart is his who loved me first and always through wounds and peril and exile. You, my Lord Umfraville, would have taken me against my will, not knowing that a woman's heart can not be so won. If I am to be judge——

"You, Geoffrey, and you, my father, have seen the best and the worst of this man. He could not kill me even to withhold me from his enemy. He has dealt very kindly with me, so far as he knew how. I will not marry him; but do you be just to him as he has been just to me."

She placed her hand in Geoffrey's and waited for him to speak.

"Let him have pardon."

Geoffrey spoke deliberately, as one not to be denied.

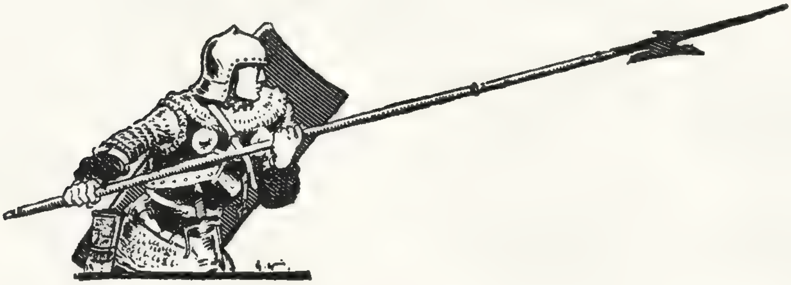
"Margaret and your men-at-arms go with us, Sir Giles. Let Umfraville keep his castle, his own men and all his goods. We seek not plunder nor wealth. But Margaret is mine, nor will I ever yield her to any man!"

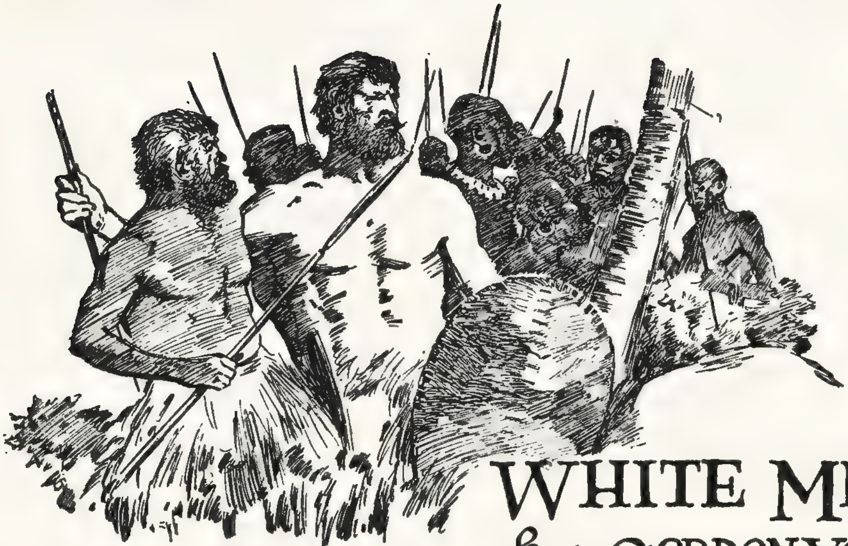
Gislac agreed.

"A just judgment," he said. "Farewell, Umfraville. God grant you to be as honest to others as you have been to my daughter. Ho, sir priest. Follow me. We have need of you in High Tower."

THE sun flashed on the bright mail and glowing cloaks of armed men riding along the Murkwood's edge, toward distant, unseen High Tower. The lone watcher on the battlements of Flamford Keep gazed long after them, misery in his eyes.

Even after they had vanished in the Autumn wood, even till the sun sank, he stood looking where they had disappeared. Darkness stole over him. The stars came out. St. Simeon's Day had passed.





WHITE MEN

By GORDON YOUNG

Author of "The Frame-Up," "Sir Galahad and the Badger," etc.

BOTH the men were half-drunk, but they squatted somberly on the coarse mat and said nothing. The eyes of one went restively about, glancing from shadowed corner to black doorway as if looking for something that might be invisible. The other man stared dead ahead. Now and then their gaze met across the wavering flame tip of a candle in a bottle's neck; now and then, too, one would raise a square-face, suck at the gurgling mouth and in silence hand it to his companion.

Moths plunged at the candle, and handsful of them, drunk with fire, lay on the mat. The night was black. Through the doorway the men could see the thin line of luminous foam drawn around the outer reefs and feel the thud of the combers that came rolling up the sand on the other side of the island.

The weird night noise of the bush, the screeching and clicking of insects, clash and grating of wind-rubbed branches, hoot of birds, even the rattle and click of pebbles on the beach, touched their ears with depressing, almost harrowing emphasis, though they were rough and desperate fellows, both of them.

A corpse, burned out by fever, lay behind them in the stiff attitude of painful death. The thin face was bearded; the skeleton chest lay bare; the shriveled bony legs were thrust into muslin drawers.

"Oh, ——!" said the older man hoarsely, glancing over his shoulder.

"——," said the other fellow, his eyes fastened unseeingly straight before him.

Both meant the same thing; and each had made a sort of prayer. It is only when prayers are made aloud and long, for the ears of men, that they are nimble with the inflection of graceful words. These fellows knew nothing of praying and there was no knee-bending humbleness about them. They were in the devil's pickling-jar, and the lid was ready to be screwed down.

"An' the blighter had to up an' die!" said the elder man, poking the short neck of a gin bottle through his bushy beard.

He was a burly fellow, thick and short, with a bull's neck and shoulders. His voice was like that of a man hoarse with a cold and seemed to come from somewhere down in his belly instead of his throat. The nose was broken, the forehead scarred, the hair thick and uneven. He called himself Brannigan and said that he had been sent out for missing an English landlord. The fowling-rifle was a bit rusty from much lying out in rain and dew of nights waiting for the chance. If he hadn't missed the lord of the land he would have been hanged in Ireland, not deported to Tasmania from where he had escaped, years before, with a price on his shaggy head.

The gin bottle, like a misshapen shuttle, weaved to and fro between them; and nothing more was said until the bottom was raised to the rafters. On cross-pieces laid on the rafters much of the trade-goods of the dead man had been stored.

"They'll know at daylight," said Brannigan, jerking his head sidewise.

The other man growled but said nothing.

At dawn the natives would find out that the trader was dead and be sure that he had been killed by magic. They did not believe in disease, but in devils; and death in war was the only natural death. All else was wizardry and spite-work.

Besides, in some way, the dead trader had got into friendship with them and they seemed to have no wish for friendship with other white men. Without his protection Brannigan and Jack Rodgers knew there was nothing to keep their heads from the gamal-house rafters—and worse.

"It's right on to the isle where the devil breeds an' trains his imps that we have fallen," said Brannigan, biting the end from a stick of black tobacco. "An' I thought there was a good angel 'r somebody what was watchin' o'er us. What the —— did he want to die for!"

Rodgers got up stiffly. His legs were both cramped and a little unsteady. He walked to the doorway and leaned out. He knew why Webb, the trader, had wanted to die. With fever babbling he had told them, cursing the South Seas; also the northern lands, God himself and the devil too. Rodgers understood, for there were times when he felt like that.

A man was a fool for thinking that he could ever lose himself. As well try to cut off his shadow and throw it away. The world was round and the harder you ran the quicker you got back to the place from which you had started. Rodgers knew. He had been all over and not cared what he did at any place, whether in service against Chinese pirates, fighting for Peru, pearling, smuggling or blackbirding. The only thing that had saved him from being a debauched sand-groper was a body stronger than the wretched gin and rum that he drank; for he drank, gambled and fought wherever there was the chance.

Rodgers was tall, straight, almost as broad as Brannigan; he was well into his thirties, and his face was covered with a short curling beard that concealed his jaws; but one knew by the cut of his nose and forehead, the heavy sullen stare in his deep-set eyes, that he had angular square jaws.

Brannigan was wanted for one sort of crime and another at almost every place that he had been; but he had a sort of buoyant good-nature under his brutality, which was perhaps the Irish part of his spirit, that gave him friendships where an ordinary blackguard would have been stranded. He was past sixty, tough as gristle, and had been deported in his teens. For more than thirty years, since he broke prison, he had been living in a wretched, desperate way. Rodgers was as desperate a fellow but morose, sullen.

Rodgers stared broodingly from the doorway. Tiny fire beetles swarmed with slow wavering flight through the darkness—like a spray of molten gold on black velvet. Overhead a sleepy cockatoo squawked at a jostling neighbor, a moment's fluttering beat of wings, then silence. The muffled drumming on the outer reefs sounded the charge of breakers, that leaped with sudden whiteness; and all about was the heavy mystery of tropic night sounds—and silence.

"Bran?"

"I'm hearin' ye."

"They'll try to club us when we're not looking—eating, maybe. It's their way." Rodgers spoke without turning.

"An' it's not even drunk that we can get. Webb said he might as well go along an' die—he was that near out o' gin. The blighter!"

A long pause.

Then—

"Bran?"

"Oh I'm still here."

"Let's tear in first jump out of the box an' get as many as we can. Better do that than get our heads knocked off when we aren't looking. It's along this coast they throw you alive on to the coals. Helps the flavor."

Brannigan cursed explosively, but his voice rapidly died down to a grumble, then became quiet.

THEY had no way of knowing how Webb had become friends with the cannibals on Nauro Island, at the mouth of Hathorn Sound, New Georgia; and had they known, they could not have practised the little tricks of parlor magic which gave him prestige; nor could they have been as patient and fair-dealing as the trader, for which the savages had respected him greatly.

Webb, like many an ambitionless man who goes on outpost for a trading-company, had neither love of life nor a sense of adventure. At first all he had wanted was the chance of being off from white men—as if it were not more difficult to forget in solitude than in a crowd; and he had moved into a house that was built on crooked piling, some four feet high, put in a few days killing spiders and scorpions, then discovered that it was easier to get drunk.

He had given many presents to Chief Orokgo, including a gaudy jumping-jack that seemed to have come out of thin air. Across the channel about a mile away were two traders who went heavily armed and would not stir out at night. They warned Webb that he would be killed if he did not take better care of himself, but he let his guns get choked with rust and traded the bullets off as beads.

The traders across the channel were brained one night as they slept, guns by their sides; and Webb night after night went to his mat intentionally so drunk that mosquitoes could not awaken him and always found his head on his shoulders the next morning.

Orokgo's savages were no different from the score of other tribes scattered in villages on the beaches and many islands of the Sound. They were a lot of headhunting cannibals, vengeful, treacherous, cowardly in some ways and amazingly bold in others. But Webb had become a favorite, and Orokgo put a tabu on his head so none of the gallant young bucks, who prayed for white men's heads, dared touch it.

The tabu is an astonishing power that all of the chiefs of all the South Sea Islands have. It is a good deal like the "King's X" of a children's game, and to violate it is unthinkable. The tabu always forbids; and in most of the islands where pork is a favorite with them it is tabu for women to touch it. The chief may make it tabu to visit certain localities, to fish, hunt, eat of certain things. No matter how severe the tabu, its authority was not questioned until the missionaries offered the Ten Commandments as a substitute.

For three years Webb had lived on the island, and after his neighbors across the channel had been murdered he did not see another white man until the coming of Brannigan and Rodgers. The company's schooner that was to visit him every eight months had been wrecked or lost; and he was beached high and dry. He heard of various ships that approached, and a few times had seen them in the distance, but he had not been able to reach or get word to any of them.

Brannigan and Rodgers had been blackbirding, and with the 'tween decks full of natives slammed below in one way and another they had found their ship on fire at night, and the crew had taken to the boats. The cannibals had been practically kidnaped for Fijian plantations; and in the rageful, senseless way of heathens had spoiled the harvesting of much sugar cane by setting fire to the *Betty Bly* and burning themselves to death.

It had been about the middle of the midwatch that the smell of burning wood became noticeable. Brannigan, though crude dead reckoning was about all he knew of navigating, was the skipper and on deck. He paced about sniffing the air, and growing more and more excited. Fire at sea is one of the things the devil himself would dread if he turned passenger. All was quiet. Heavy gratings were over the hatches, and the snoring and grunting of the sixty cannibals made a sound like the spluttering of a great pot.

There were four white men on the schooner, Brannigan and Rodgers as ship's officers, the recruiter and a boatswain; and ten black boys, Fijians and Tongans.

The *Betty Bly* was flush deck, and Brannigan ran forward sniffing and calling to the black boys on watch. In a minute they had located the trace of smoke at the forward hatch grating; and when Brannigan hoarsely bellowed below he seemed to awaken a dozen score of fiends. They yelled and shrieked and began swarming against the gratings, thrusting out long black arms with groping fingers. All hands were roused out, for —— had broken loose; and those on deck could do nothing but watch, listen and futilely dash water on to the gratings.

No one could do more than guess at what had happened, but there was only one guess that seemed reasonable. A half a dozen of the natives were permitted on deck twice a day to cook for the recruits, and they had a fire-place just back of the foremast. In some way they must have smuggled coals below with the desperate intention of firing the ship; and they succeeded. What they had in mind would be impossible to say, but it is very well known that there are many things that a Solomon Islander dreads more than death. It was certain that all of the natives were not in the plot, for many had been asleep; but their terror when the fire got under way was in itself terrifying.

It would have been impossible to keep command of the deck if those savages were turned lose on the deck. They had been lured below by trinkets and free gin. The *Betty Bly* pretended to be a trader, not a blackbirder; and when there was a good crowd below, the hatches had been clapped on, the helm raised and off she scooted.

When there is fire between decks the first thing to be done is to clap on the hatches, and make everything air tight in the effort to smother the flames; but even Brannigan, who stopped at nothing, hesitated at that. It meant cruel suffocation for threescore human beings. The two pumps were turned on and the gratings flooded in an effort to reach the fire, but it had taken hold and smoke boiled up amid the coughing and screaming of the wild men.

"For God's sake let 'em out!" Rodgers cried.

"They'll have our heads—biff!" Brannigan roared, with something almost like anguish in his hoarse, coarse voice.

"Aye," said Rodgers. "But——"

And he did not answer. It was the truth, and life is precious no matter how little a man may care for it. Besides, they were on the high seas and there would be none to tell the story of what had been done except men who could be trusted to tell it without mentioning the recruits. The black boys of the crew could be depended on. Rodgers did not ponder that fact, that is, consciously; but away down deep, he must have felt it.

When the boatswain was dragging the hatch covers out, Rodgers struck him back saying—

"Don't smother 'em— don't!"

The poor devils were in writhing fighting clusters at the hatch gratings, gasping for air, screaming. They tore at one another murderously, thrusting out their arms as if to snatch something to breathe. It would have been an act of cruel mercy to clap down the hatch-coverings and have their torment over; but instead they were half-drowned by the streams of salt water.

Brannigan had no head for a crisis. The best he could do was shout and puff and let Rodgers take charge. Rodgers was cold and unexcitable. He knew it was a suicidal massacre to let the natives out of their fiery pit, but some remnant of decency kept him from taking the brutal measure that might have checked, perhaps have smothered, the fire.

All of the natives were burned and suffocated anyway. The cries seemed piercing enough to be heard half-way around the earth. The stench of scorched flesh filled the night like the sacrifice on a monstrous altar to Moloch; and before the flames broke through—after all voice and movement was silenced below—the crew of the *Betty Bly* knew there was nothing left for them but the open boats. There was land to the right of them and land to the left of them; but every beach was dotted with the villages of cannibals.

The recruiter and boatswain with five black boys took one boat; Brannigan, Rodgers and the other sailors went off together. The boats separated in the night and nothing was ever heard of the recruiter and his companions. At dawn, which followed soon after they had taken to the boats, they were out of sight; so it was supposed that in some way the boat had been swamped.

"Their luck's better 'an ours, my boy," said Brannigan as he stood up and stared about and saw two swiftly approaching canoes with slender stems and sterns reaching like great swan-necks from the water. "If you ever learned any prayers, now's the time to use 'em."

However it had happened that for one of the few nights since he had been on the island, Webb had not been drunk enough to stay asleep. Some way or other the liquor would not take hold; and he had pulled his mat down to the beach where it was cool and mosquitoes were fewer.

As he sat smoking and brooding he saw the speck of fire that grew larger than the torch of any fishing-party; and when he realized that a ship was burning he raised a cry that brought men running to the beach. The canoes were run out of their sheds and into the water, and some two dozen paddlers, with the ever-present tomahawks and clubs at their feet, struck the water. Webb sat in the stern of the larger canoe near Orokgo and as they raced for the burning ship the dawn came as suddenly as if a great breath had blown away the darkness.

Brannigan was never at loss for a lie when one seemed to be needed; and as little hope as they had on seeing the war canoes approach, he knew there would be even less if the cannibals suspected them of being blackbirders, so he told the crew they must say they were traders and that the fire had been started by a lantern falling down a hatch.

The sea was smooth as a pond except for the ruffling wake of the canoes that came on fast as horses gallop; and the rowers, all facing ahead, sat in staring silence.

Webb stood up and shouted:

"Hey-O, there! What's happened to you?"

Brannigan stood up and gave his lie with loud hoarseness, turning around as the canoers with dextrous strokes swept in a circle about the drifting boat. Rodgers, with arms folded, crouched sullenly in the stern sheets. Sometimes he would press his ears as if trying to shake something out.

And when Brannigan had answered Webb talked with Chief Orokgo, whose arms and neck were twined with cowrie shells and colored grass tufts; and as became his caste, a crescent cut from a great clam shell and polished thin, hung on his breast. The canoes had come much closer and with almost imperceptible motion floated encirclingly about the boat. The fifty thick black faces, distorted with bones through the nose and weights at the ear lobes, stared —just stared.

Webb was a tall thin fellow with a bushy black beard and sunken eyes. His voice was rasping, shrill.

"I may be able to get you fellows out o' this," he called; and the canoe coming nearer, he climbed from it into the boat.

A canoe took the painter and made off.

He shook hands and introduced himself and asked eagerly for the news of the outer world. He was almost childish at hearing the voice of his own people again; but he was cynical and bitter at life itself.

"—— be some job to keep your heads on your shoulders. Nice big hairy heads, you've got. These fellows 'd just as soon have a head they 've taken off a sleepin' man as any other. Like back in white man's country money is money, however you get it. I been here three years—an' 've had to go slow on gin the last eighteen months. It's been hard. I'm telling Orokgo your ship was coming to relieve me. All my people dead I guess. Copra's molded—I quit buyin'. . . ."

As they approached the beach, children came bounding and shrieking out of the bush and the whole village emerged from the shadows of the forest. Their excitement grew. There was much tossing of arms, grinning and loud talk; and when the crew was landed everybody swarmed close around the prisoners, staring and making remarks.

With the village at their heels Brannigan and Rodgers were led away by Webb to his hut; but the black boys of the *Betty Bly* were taken off and that night the village had a howling big feast. And fresh heads were set to dry among the rafters.

The first few days Brannigan and Rodgers lived in a condition of nervous alertness. They knew if they were to be killed it would be without warning and from behind; and though they were being treated very well, and Webb half-mockingly assured them that he had "hopes" there was always the chance that some ambitious buck would swing a club. So they drank Webb's gin; and he, companionable and greedy, got drunk and stayed drunk, became feverish, delirious, raved and died.

And so Brannigan and Rodgers kept the death watch by the candle; and the last of the gin bottles had been opened and emptied.

II

WITH the coming of dawn Brannigan went to the doorway, too; and he and Rodgers stared toward the clearing amid trees of a hundred and more feet in height where the village was stirring into wakefulness. Scrawny chickens warily searched for breakfast and dogs went nosing about, sniffing here and there, trotting off with a preoccupied air—lean hungry dogs. Fat ones were beaten to death and cooked; beating made the flesh tender.

From various doorways natives appeared, sleepy and stiff, yawning and stretching, gazing at the tops of trees, feeling the sort of weather it was to be, and calling back and forth.

It was quiet, cool, peaceful. The sweet freshness of morning was in the air. Within an hour it would be hot; by noon, stifling, sultry, and the long afternoon's sun would seem a fever spot; the evening would be miserable with heat and insects and the stink of rank vegetation, of an unclean village.

"——!" said Brannigan.

"Shut up," said Rodgers, without moving.

"What 're we goin' to do? Be a-tellin' me that, Rod." Brannigan replied.

"I told you. Take them when they 're not looking an' kill as many as we can."

Brannigan shook his head. That would not, he said, do any good. The thing would be hopeless. There ought to be some way to get in well with the savages—he called them "haythens." Lots of white men lived among them. Many of the tribes that made the most success at cutting out ships were led by white men, which showed it was possible to save your head. There had been fellows that had lived for years even among the bushmen.

Rodgers may have heard, but he was not listening.

Brannigan went on:

"I've looked this shack over." He pointed toward the rafters. "He's got a few clay pipes an' some beads left. A half a case of tembac—an' tobacco's next to gin. Three guns here. So rusty they'd blow a man up to shoot 'em, if you could be a-findin' anything to shoot in 'em. We know niggers, you and me. There's some way. Try to think, Rod."

And Rodgers answered—

"Oh, ——!"

The black young cannibal who cooked for Webb came shuffling along, and grinned at them. Soon they heard him clattering pans in the cooking shack, and after an hour he brought in coffee made of stewed grounds, and served a pie-plate full of moldy biscuits.

There were three mugs of coffee.

Five minutes later the news that Weppy was dead would have been through the village; but Brannigan, acting without a moment's previous thought, strode heavily across the bamboo floor and poked the corpse with his foot.

"Hey, Webb. Up all hands here. Heave-oh. Tucker, me boy. Oh, well, stop along plenty much."

Brannigan carelessly picked up some sacking and threw it over Webb's face; then, with a hard painful effort at good nature, he faced the young cannibal and pointed at the empty bottles:

"Him fella plenty drunk. Belly sick. No coffee stop along with him."

The young cannibal grinned; and when he had gone Brannigan raised the coffee with a hand that trembled so he spilt most of the cup before he sucked it gulpingly.

"You're a fool," said Rodgers sullenly.

"No. No. I tell you something will happen. We need time. To think. We've got to think. Nobody will know today. Webb is drunk."

"And we are crazy," Rodgers answered in a tone of depressed finality.

All morning they sat there moodily, not daring to leave lest the secret get out; and when natives came, wanting tobacco or fish-hooks, Brannigan tried to explain amusingly that the trader was drunk and asleep. He was anxiously alert to see responsive grins on their faces.

Rodgers sat without speaking, looking at him with steady, contemptuous eyes. The only comment he made at all was—

"Aw, stop that play-acting an' let's fight it out."

"I'm playin' for time, Rod. Something 's got to happen. Just you see."

What happened was that about the middle of the afternoon the word went in and through the village that Weppy was dead; and natives came up and squatted in a semicircle in front of the doorway to find out about it. The young cannibal cook had spread the word. He did not know whether or not the trader was dead. A native does not consider it necessary to be accurate, and is likely to declare what he imagines with the emphasis of fact. This is due less to dishonesty, of which Solomon Islanders have as much as other people, then to a lack of shades and nuances in the language. He noticed that Webb had not changed his position an inch in eight hours, so he went forth and said that the white men had killed the trader. When a man dies, somebody has killed him.

The village wanted to know; and Orokgo himself came. Now that Webb was dead, and his trade-goods could be had for the taking, the deceased had become even more dear to Orokgo. And he scowled mightily.

The cannibals, naked except for wisps of grass and threaded shells, their bodies slick and shiny with oil, squatted in solemn array; immobile, with a kind of ominous dignity.

Orokgo and two or three under-chiefs came with ceremonial strides to the foreground and squatted on their haunches. Hoarse harsh murmurs ran through the group.

Rodgers sat hunched on the top step leading to the doorway and glared down morosely. He could not check the feeling that here assembled were judges to pass on the *Betty Bly*. It looked like justice. His big hands were clenched into hard fists. At the first move from the savages, he would leap and make them kill him. There would be no throwing of him alive on hot coals.

In the broken crude jargon that traders used, some fellow to whom Orokgo had spoken stood up and began to speak.

Rodgers found himself listening attentively—not because he was interested, but there was nothing else to do.

Brannigan listened too. His forehead was beaded with sweat. A big rough red hand clawed nervously at his red beard. His barrel-like body was rigidly tense. Brannigan did not want to die. He was chilled with desperation, terror. It was not cowardice, but fear of the mystery; and he hung to life as a man clings to a raft and suffers torment when he might slip into the cool deep water and be at peace.

Brannigan was blindly determined that he would not die, that someway he would save his life. White men, lots of them, had lived with cannibals. He listened and heard that Weppy was brother to the high big marster Orokgo, who had a belly full of tears; that Weppy was strong and full of meat before the strangers came, then grew weak and now was dead. Strong magic had been used.

And Brannigan stood up and lied as he had very rarely ever lied before, though he was handicapped by the miserable jargon and limited words. But Webb was his dear friend. His ship had been coming to Webb with much trade-goods and many presents for the village. And there had been spite-magic. It burned the ship, and now it had taken Webb's life. Aye, aye, there were enemies abroad right there in the village. And there were enemies in other villages on whom Orokgo made war. He, Brannigan was a great warrior. He and his friend Rodgers would show Orokgo ways to victory. An' bimeby trade shippee stop along here, me-you cut 'm fella out. Plenty tembac. Plenty much *kai-kai. Ow!*

The value of having white men to help them board a ship for purpose of massacre was clearly seen. A canoe with white men in it could approach a ship. White men trusted white men. Brannigan and Rodgers were big strong fellows; and the tribal wars were incessant. Orokgo was a wise old savage.

But there had been spite-magic. Somebody must suffer. And who had had a better chance to work spite-magic than the cook? Besides, he had no male relatives to avenge him. Certainly it was the cook. Hadn't he known that Weppy was dead when the white men did not know it themselves?

And they killed him, for the dead must have vengeance.

III

THE life of the white man who goes down to live with natives as a native is made up of dirty idleness. With a gesture he discards twenty centuries of white culture and again becomes a walking belly.

Brannigan took to it with a kind of drunken zest, for there may be enthusiasm in debasement no less than in martyrdom. He married three women, for there was much work to do in the cooking-shack and garden plots. He fished, hunted and fought. He slept on mats and began to be touched with rheumatism; and when his clothes wore out, as they did in a few weeks, he wore a plaited grass girdle and sunshade. And Orokgo called him brother.

Rodgers grew more and more sullen. He lived alone. He would have no wives. Tall, broad, glowering, bearded, tanned black and naked, he made a formidable figure; and the only times that he broke from his sullenness was in a fight. Then he was terrible and bold, and many a man got a name for bravery by following at his heels. Village after village on the islands around about hastened into an alliance with Orokgo; and even the raiders that came out of the dreaded Rubiana lagoon were met on the water and put to flight, for the white man's fighting spirit of Brannigan and

Rodgers was as magic to their followers.

"Ho," said Brannigan, with a note of strain in his husky deep voice, "we're bein' as well off here as what we were any place. An' what difference will it be makin' whether your friends are white or black, Rod? Cheer up, my boy. Some o' these girls aren't so bad if you don't look 'em in the face. Get yourself two or three. There's plenty to eat an' lots o' fights. What more c'n a pair of Irishmen want!"

"To feel we belong to the white breed," said Rodgers morosely.

Brannigan stared at him, not quite sure whether his friend was crazy or whether he, Brannigan, had heard aright.

IV

THE little schooner was sighted far out to sea. It was the first white man's craft that had cut through the horizon line in the eight months Brannigan and Rodgers had been savages; and there was no way for them to reach it unless it came close and dropped anchor. They would have to steal away to it—if they got to it. Orokgo was a wise savage. He knew the call of blood was strong, and he liked his white men too well to trust them on board a ship.

This was made plain when he urged them into his canoe. Formerly each had a canoe and from twenty to thirty rowers; but now with a white ship beating up into the sound, Orokgo wanted them under his thumb. And when they got in, Orokgo kept the canoe so far off that it was impossible for the trader's crew to distinguish the white men among the twoscore blacks in the war-canoe over a half-mile away.

"She has nary a chance if they rush 'er," said Brannigan, critically noting the low freeboard of the trader, her flush deck and low railing.

"An' they'll cut her out," said Rodgers. "That's what we're for—to help them!"

And Brannigan, whose hide was as thick as his sensibilities were coarse, was stung by the bitterness in the tone.

"She hasn't a chance anyway," he came back, half-angrily and half-heartedly.

"I know it," said Rodgers.

"Must be idiots on board 'er."

"Are you going to help 'em cut her out?" Rodgers asked it slowly.

"She hasn't a chance, Rod. An' if we don't——"

Rodgers eyed him coldly from under half-drooped lids. It was the same thing that had been said when the labor recruits had been smothered under the *Betty Bly's* grating; and again when Webb lay dead, and the eight months of a cannibal's life had followed; and it was as if life were worth everything else.

As if there were some malevolent spirit at her helm, the little schooner was brought through the coral and shoals with the touch of a registered pilot and planted her mud-hook a hundred yards out from the coral landing place of the village.

"She's gone!" Rodgers groaned as he heard the creak and whir of anchor cable.

He could not understand her folly. Orokgo could not understand his luck: a little defenseless schooner had come through the channel and tied herself down right in front of his village. Orokgo was highly pleased.

A dozen war-canoes were on the water and a hundred little outriggers. They scooted around and back and forth, keeping at a distance from the little schooner, but drawing nearer and nearer all the time. A strange thing among the Solomon Islanders is that they are so cowardly that if there be a score of them and only one white man they will wait until his back is turned to strike; and a stranger thing is that they are so careless of life that when the fight spirit is on them they will swarm indifferently on to decks swept by a rain of bullets. They are always treacherous and at times audacious.

Chief Orokgo spoke to Brannigan:

"Tell 'm fella stop along beach. Plenty much good friends. One, two, three—all come along beach. Much trade bimeby. Tell 'm fella."

Then the chief spoke to the paddlers and the long canoe with up-reared stem fluttered its colored grass wisps and made for the trader.

Rodgers suggested that it would be better if he and Brannigan went on board; but the wise old chief grinned and said No, that wouldn't do, for he was afraid the strangers might hurt his friends.

Brannigan laughed and Rodgers swore; then in a whisper he said:

"Bran, tell 'em for ——'s sake to keep all canoes off and to get out with the evening tide. Only a miracle can save them. Tell 'em—these blacks won't know what you're saying."

"An' don't be foolin' yourself that they won't know. Then where 'd we be? I hate to see them fellows get it—but not even a miracle can save 'em, anyway."

"You won't warn 'em?" Rodgers demanded.

"You're a-losing your senses. No."

"They're *white* men."

"So're we; an' if it ain't them, it's us that'll get cooked."

Rodgers gave him no answer with words, but his eyes burned from under the half-drooped lids; and the look in them was not the look of sanity. His powerful hands opened and closed, opened and closed, gropingly.

"Ahoy there!" Brannigan roared.

Three white men stood at the rail and oddly enough did not appear at all surprized to see white men amid cannibals. One of them called back—"

"Ahoy yourself, an' come on board to have a drink."

"Can't do it," Brannigan called back. "Our friends here got a funny custom. It ain't hospitable to visit a ship before the crew comes ashore. An' you know how natives are. You boys paddle right over to the beach an' we'll have a great pow-wow. Traders, ain't you? Just in time to make a clean up an' ——"

The canoe was in a short stone's throw of the schooner, and broadside, nearly motionless; and no other canoe was so close, but all of the others held back awaiting whatever signal Orokgo might make.

And Brannigan did not finish his *gammon*, for a voice loud and clear as a bugle cried away to the schooner:

"That's a lie. They're planning to cut you out. We're white cannibals——"

Savages are not quick to understand the unexpected and, their English being rather vague, they did not comprehend just what was being said; but Brannigan, as if in a spasm of terror, turned and his fingers reached for Rodgers' throat to choke off the words.

"You fool—fool!" Brannigan whispered fiercely.

But Rodgers stood up and smote him a blow with a knot-like fist that rocked the canoe when Brannigan tumbled backward, full length, against the rowers so that there was confusion. Then Rodgers leaped into the water and with the long overhand rolling stroke of the ocean swimmer made for the schooner; and before the canoe could be brought around he was being helped over the side. And his first cry was:

"Your guns—quick. They're going to rush you."

The three men, they were three young men, gaped at him blankly. They were scarcely more than boys, from somewhere out of the Saxon's North, looking for adventure. A little money had been pooled in a trading-schooner and they had got an old-time trader and captain to go out with them; but he had died of dysentery at sea. Among the crew was a New Georgian who had been kidnaped off Nauro Island a dozen years before; and he had told the three young men of how friendly his village would be, and of the trading he would help them do. Knowing the currents and depths of the sound better than the lines of his own hand, he had brought them in. But as Rodgers came on board he splashed overboard and swam off to the canoe.

There was a moment of rageful howling as the savages saw the schooner had been warned; and Brannigan was tomahawked from behind as he was trying to explain to Orokgo. Even cannibals despise the man that breaks from his caste. And after the burst of howls, which was caught up and echoed from canoe to canoe and re-echoed among the depths of the deep dark forest, there was silence. Some canoes hung off at a distance, but three began making a wide circle about the schooner, and at the bow of Orokgo's was suspended the bushy red-bearded head of Brannigan.

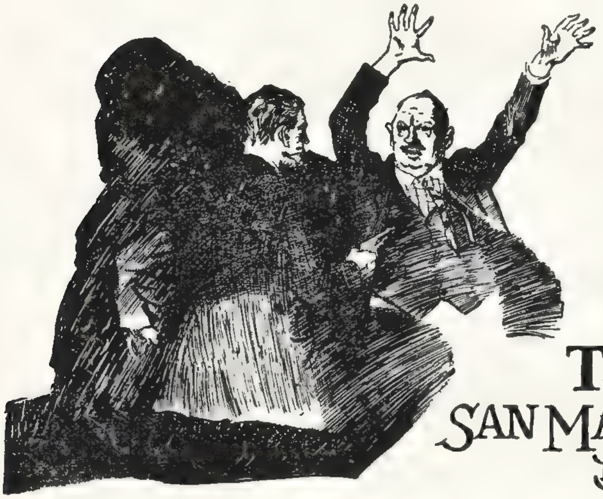
Rodgers looked over the half-dozen boys of the native crew, Tanna boys and Samoans. At least there would be no treachery from them. The three young white men, who had been searching for adventure, broke out their arms; and the guns were dirty and rusty from a lack of care. There were no cutlases. Rodgers took the carpenter's broad ax and fastened a loop to the handle so it would hang over his forearm; and though he knew death was too near to be missed, he laughed. The three white boys could never have imagined that he was a morose sullen man. They, too, were nervous, excited, but somehow happy.

The circling canoes moved closer and closer; and as a wild yelling started from every direction two of them broke from the circle and bore down alongside. Guns burst at them. They came on. Other canoes, paddling madly, swept up. Cannibals swarmed over the side. There were screams and cries, clubbing and flashes of fire.

The three boys died on the deck of the schooner where they had found the adventure they came seeking; and they died passing words of cheer one to the other, after the manner of the white race.

Rodgers fought up and down the deck. And when he had broken his emptied rifle over the head of a savage, he swung the ax. He was not fighting for life. His voice rose and fell with his blows, and he taunted them and mocked them. They cut him and hacked him and beat him, but he would not die. He killed and cursed, but his curses were like shouts of victory. It was as though he was winning something greatly wanted—wanted even more than life and safety.

And when at last he fell at the foot of the foremast, there were bodies all about, and the deck was smeared with red; but even in death he seemed laughing noiselessly, and the savages stared at the face wonderingly—wondering how a man could have such happiness after death.



THE SAN MARCOS AFFAIR*

by RUSSELL A. BOGGS

Author of "The Ways of William Skipp," "Old Fellows," etc.

WITH a round piece of blue chalk Tom Crane, who ran the San Marcos station for the E. W. & T. Railroad, industriously rubbed the under edge of the lower sash in his depot's rear window. He paused directly and critically inspected his work.

"That'll do, I believe," he said. On the ground at his feet he dropped the chalk. "Now we'll see."

The window was open, the lower sash being raised as high as it would go. Crane proceeded to clamber up over the sill and into the office. It was not a large window and despite the fact that he doubled up considerably in crawling through he found that his back scraped the chalked under edge of the lower sash.

Within the office he removed his coat and contemplated the smear of chalk on it, at approximately the point of the garment which, when worn, covered his right shoulder-blade. A little smile of satisfaction came into Agent Tom's face. It was a smooth, clean young face; strong and pleasant. Crane's years were but twenty-odd.

"Now that seemed to work real slick," he remarked. "I expect I'll just go ahead with my little scheme. Maybe I'll catch me a big bad-man or something."

With a soiled hand-towel he rubbed off thoroughly the chalk which he had but a few moments before applied to the sash.

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Then from the lower shelf of the big stationery cupboard which stood along the office wall opposite the big test switchboard he took a half-pint can of red paint. With a small stick he stirred up some of the heavy sediment from the bottom of the can. This he daubed in a wide streak from side to side on the sash where the chalk had been.

He inspected the result.

"That ought to be all right," he concluded. "It shouldn't dry before morning; and if it should happen to come in contact with somebody's clothing it'll not come off like chalk."

He carefully lowered the sash then and turned the catch. And five minutes later he locked up his depot and departed for the night.

That was Tuesday.

WHEN on Wednesday morning Tom Crane opened the door of his office in the litttle station at San Marcos he found that for the fourth time in four weeks a despoiler had come in the night. The office floor was littered with scraps of paper, splintered thin boards and miscellaneous articles from torn-open and disordered express packages and boxes which the evening before had stood in neat order along the wall near the door. One of the top panes in the rear window had been smashed in, slivers of glass sparkling here and there about. Young Crane was not surprized. He regarded the general disorder with something between gravity and amusement.

"Well, you did come again," he observed. "That makes four times, in one month. Very persistent. Hoity-te-dum! Let's see if there's any of my red detector gone."

The intruder had gained entrance by the simple expedient of breaking the top window-pane, reaching in and turning back the catch, then raising the lower sash. Upon departure the visitor had not bothered to pull down the sash; it still was raised. The slender, steel brake-shoe key—taken from a car on the siding—which he had used to break the glass and which also had served as a jimmy with which to pry up the sash, was lying on the window-sill. A little splotch of red paint showed that it had been used in the latter manner; this seemingly indicating that the man had not touched the paint with his fingers, hence would not have been made suspicious of a trap.

Placing the brake-shoe key to one side, Crane examined the under edge of the raised sash. He saw at once that in one place the paint was smeared into a slightly broader streak than he had made—as if something had brushed against it. Crane grinned.

"That will be something to watch for!" he said.

From the window then he turned and once more contemplated his untidy floor.

"There'll not be much missing," he surmised. "There never has been before and I don't believe there will be now. Pure danged cussedness, one might think. Yes, one might. Anyway, I'll be dished if I wire the old man or our honorable police department. I'm sick of that. All they'd do would be send that shiny-faced, fat-necked, greasy-cheeked, bald-pated Officer Bissel down here to investigate. I'll not deny it; that policeman fellow gives me one large overdeveloped pain."

He pinched his lower lip reflectively for a moment.

"I'll tell you what I might do though," he said then. "If I don't read sign on anybody's garment by noon I might hop on Number Sixty-six and run in to Carbon City to see the old man. I ought to reach some sort of an understanding with him. This thing's gone far enough. That sounds pretty good; I'd almost bet it's what I'm liable to do."

He pulled some of the plugs from the long test switchboard that extended along one side of the office; whereat the telegraph sounders began to clatter. The Carbon City wire-chief was calling him for a test, and for the next ten or fifteen minutes Crane was busy at the board, pushing plugs in there, pulling them out here, grounding, patching, opening, closing, very expertly.

"How are 235, 236 and 237 there?" queried the wire-chief presently.

"Closed straight—" began Tom and then he noticed that a bottom plug was missing from wire number 236. "235 and 237 are closed straight," he corrected. "236 is open."

"How come 236 is open?" asked the W. C.

"Can't say," replied Tom. "Thought I had 'em all closed last night."

As he finished his eyes happened to drop downward and there, right close to a rifled package, he noticed a plug lying. He opened his key again.

"I see now," he said. "There's a plug on the floor. Must have dropped out of 236 during the night."

"All right; close it then," directed the wire-chief. "Try and watch 'em though; keep 'em tight."

"O. K.," said Tom, and closed the key. He was a trifle puzzled however; he always did keep his plugs tight. Still, it might have worked loose some way. Or maybe that guy last night bumped it out. Well, so-so; he'd have to get to work and clean up his office and straighten out his disorganized express matter.

Within an hour Crane had cleared up the wreckage. As far as he had been able to ascertain, nothing much had been taken from any of the packages. To all appearances if looked as if the marauder had broken in during the night and found nothing which he considered valuable and had scorned to take away any of the other articles. There was a bundle of books, a package of shoes, a package of ribbons, a pasteboard box containing a man's suit, a wooden box of medicine, a box of small castings wrapped in excelsior—all these he put in order again. The loss, if any, apparently was small.

The morning passed, and as his few patrons came into the station Tom unobtrusively eyed them for evidences of red paint. There was the store man, the hotel man, the postmaster, a few ranch hands, the blacksmith and the carpenter—all men he knew and on whom he felt positive he would see nothing incriminating. He was not disappointed; he saw nothing.

Tom had dinner. And when Number Sixty-six, due at one-twenty P.M., came along Crane locked his depot and stepped aboard, bound for Carbon City, thirty miles east, division headquarters.

"Not quitting, are you, Tom?" inquired Number Sixty-six's conductor, pausing in the aisle.

"Huh!" said Crane, looking up. Somehow or other that suggestion had not struck him particularly before. He grinned slightly.

"Say, I don't know! Maybe. I'll think it over."

He thought it over all the way in to Carbon City. He was aware of a growing conviction that two years at San Marcos was plenty. Now that this line of thought had been started his youthful blood urged that it was time for new fields and new experiences. He could see now that life at San Marcos had, almost unnoticed, settled into a dull monotony. One day had been much like another; the methodical attention to endless details—passengers, express, freight, occasional outbound shipments of cattle. The only pleasing thing about it, he realized, had been the prospect of the great hills to the west and north and the far vistas to the east and south. This, unconsciously perhaps, had held him. Nevertheless, there probably were other spots as attractive.

Number Sixty-six pulled into the train shed at Carbon City and Crane got off. The upper floors of the depot building was where the division offices were located. The agent from San Marcos moved rapidly toward the main entrance of the building. Just outside the doorway stood Officer Bissel. It seemed to Crane that a swiftly concealed expression of surprize came into the policeman's cloudy light-blue eyes as he perceived Tom. For some unaccountable reason proximity to Bissel always stirred in Tom a sense of repulsion. He sought to avoid Bissel, but the officer's gross bulk blocked the way.

"What are you doing in here?" demanded Bissel.

The tone was unbearable, reeking implied authority. All Tom's vague repugnance for the man seemed to draw to a head. His pulses leaped, flaming.

"Attending to my own business," he answered shortly, hotly.

Bissel stared, plainly disconcerted for an instant. There was no mistaking the anger in Crane's eyes. The officer, however, quickly recovered some of his assurance.

"Pull in your horns," he said bruskly. "Who's relieving you at San Marcos?"

"Go ask Superintendent Munn," returned Tom briefly.

He fixed a level gaze on the policeman. He might readily have stepped either to the right or left of Bissel and so have reached the doorway. But he chose not to do either. Bissel had blocked his path; let him move.

"Step aside," ordered Tom sharply. "I want to go in that door."

The officer rumbled heavily in his chest, but didn't change his position.

"Looka here, young fellow!" he snorted. "Who you think you're talkin' to?"

"I'll count three," said Tom. "One—two——"

Officer Bissel stepped aside.

"Go on!" he growled.

A succession of deep grumblings came from him. But Crane paid no attention; he stepped past Bissel and through the depot entrance.

IT WAS drawing toward three o'clock when the agent from San Marcos arrived at Superintendent Munn's office. Munn was in, alone. A gray-haired man of average height, who had climbed from dispatcher to superintendent in five years. He regarded Crane interrogatively.

"I've come on business," said Tom at once. "My depot at San Marcos was broken into last night."

"Again?" exclaimed Munn.

"Again," assured Crane.

"Why didn't you wire?"

"I wired the other three times," replied Tom mildly. "It did no good. Today I thought I'd report personally."

"Humph!" said Munn. He frowned a bit. "Anything taken?"

"Apparently not. Nothing of value, anyway."

"Have you notified our police department?"

"No, sir."

"Why not?"

"They've already had three chances," said Tom patiently. He waved his hand expressively.

"You think it's useless?"

"Practically, yes."

"The ——!" said Munn. His frown deepened. "Who is in charge at San Marcos while you are away?" he asked suddenly.

"Business at San Marcos has ended for the day," stated Crane evenly.

"You mean there's no one there?" exclaimed Munn.

"Yes, sir," answered Tom. "Business was poor anyhow."

"You've got your nerve!" declared the superintendent. "Don't do it again."

"I'm expecting it'll not be necessary," responded Crane. "Not at San Marcos."

Munn looked at Tom sharply.

"Just what do you mean?" he asked.

"I'm figuring on leaving San Marcos," explained Tom. "Right away; now."

"Leaving!" ejaculated Munn. "What do you want to do that for?"

"I've had enough of it out there for a while," said Crane. "Enough of this thing of having somebody break into the station every week especially. It's too —— piffling."

"Well!" said Munn.

"Your policeman, Bissel, says it's hoboes who do the breaking in," continued Tom. "Says they do it out of pure devilment partly, and partly because they think they might accidently run across something worth their while. I don't know, but I think I'm beginning to see the point. I want no more of it; it's too danged trifling."

"I'd rather you'd not go," said Munn.

"Thanks. But when I think of how, every time the station got messed up, I had to make separate reports to the express people, to the railroad police department and to your office, with endless checking-up and going-over with Bissel and express company inspectors, I get weary. And it's all about nothing, practically. So Bissel as much as admits. He may be right; I'll not argue about it."

Tom paused a moment and sat regarding his shoe tips. He resumed:

"And then, too, I met a certain one railroad fellow down outside the depot here—just before I came up. His method filled me with supreme disgust. It decided me; I'm quitting."

Munn elevated his brows. "His name?"

"No name given, if you'll excuse me," returned Tom.

The superintendent shrugged his shoulders. "Very well—if you'd rather not."

"And, oh yes," said Tom, as if suddenly recalling something. "I was going to tell you that I'd tried a little scheme out at San Marcos, last night. But there doesn't seem to have been any conclusive results so far."

"What was it?" questioned Munn.

"It was supposed to be a home-made thief-catching stunt," said Crane. "Thought it up all by myself; it was that simple. Some of it seemed to work, too. Was all right as far as it went. Hasn't settled anything yet, though. It did seem to me as if it ought to be some good. But I'll be darned if——"

"But what was the stunt?" interrupted Munn.

"Oh, yes, the stunt. I'll tell you," said

Tom. "It was like this. I put some——"

The door of the superintendent's office opened precipitately. Officer Bissel entered.

"What is it, Bissel?" said Munn, rather coldly.

"I was just wondering if he'd come up here," answered Bissel. He indicated the agent from San Marcos somewhat aggressively. "Crane, I mean. I saw him downstairs."

Crane smiled sweetly. It appeared to him, however, that Bissel's eyes were moving from the superintendent to himself in a decidedly anxious, searching manner—in a much more apprehensive manner than the policeman's reason for coming would seem to have warranted. Munn considered Bissel quizzically.

"Why should you be concerned about him?" asked the superintendent.

"He wouldn't tell me why he was in Carbon City," replied Bissel. "It looked suspicious. I thought maybe he was slipping away from his job at San Marcos." His words were heavy, dogmatic.

"Oh," said Munn. He glanced shrewdly at Tom and almost smiled himself. "You needn't worry, Bissel. Crane is here, sure enough. He came in specially to see me. San Marcos station was entered last night."

"Another time!" said Bissel. His eyes opened wide for an instant, to all appearances much surprized. He looked at Crane. "What is missing?"

"I can't find a thing that ought to be gone but what's there," replied Tom brightly. "No, sir, that's so." He surveyed the officer cheerfully. "Say, Mr. Cop, you should go down there and look around. Even if you have been there three times before and found nothing you shouldn't let yourself be discouraged. Keep on trying, you know. Even the dullest of us have our bright moments."

Bissel didn't like it; there was no doubt of that. And yet, for all that, there was a certain flash of triumphant cunning in his somber eyes as he turned to the superintendent. He moved a few steps nearer Munn's desk so that he stood midway between Crane and the superintendent. His back was partly turned to the agent from San Marcos.

"There's only one way to end this thing at San Marcos," declared Bissel. "It's this: Some one will have to stay in the depot there at night and lay for these fellows. That's the only way we'll ever grab them."

Crane was standing within three feet of Bissel, and while the policeman was speaking to Munn the agent's gaze paused idly on the back of Bissel's sober black coat. Abruptly Tom's attention became fixed on something he saw there. On the officer's garment, right between the shoulders, was a faint, tiny spot of red!

"That sounds reasonable," Munn was saying to Bissel. "Why not do it?"

"I will," asserted Bissel. "I'll lay in there every night until I get them guys, if it takes six months! I'm convinced it's the one sure way."

He swung about to Tom.

"Have you got an extra set of keys that I can use when I want to get in there?"

"Mmmhh!" said Tom. "I believe."

He searched through his pockets slowly, endeavoring the while to calm his suddenly tingling nerves. Before Bissel had turned from Munn the agent had moved one step closer to the officer and had intently examined the red stain. There could be no mistake; it was a red paint stain. He had stumbled on to something, something big, he believed. In the twinkling of an eye the aspect of things had changed. He had come into Munn's office half-bored, half-irritated by the apparent pettiness of the forcible entries into San Marcos depot. But now his view abruptly was reversed. He was convinced that the affairs at San Marcos, while ostensibly the work of casual intruders and of no special significance, in reality were part of some deep-laid scheme and, considering what he had just discovered, were filled with the promise of surprizing developments.

Tom found his keys and produced them. From the ring he took two.

"This one is for the waiting-room and this is for the office," he said, handing them to Bissel.

The officer took the keys and thrust them in his pocket. Without delay he started toward the door.

"I've an idea this will end things at San Marcos," he said. "I'll look after it, starting tonight."

He opened the door and went out. Crane stood for a minute watching after him, even after the door had closed. Then he looked at Superintendent Munn.

"I've changed my mind," he said. "I'll go back to San Marcos for a while."

Munn appeared pleased.

"That's good," he said. "I'm glad to hear it." There was a mild sort of curiosity in his eyes. "I wonder what made you switch around so abruptly?"

"I've had a sort of unexpected inspiration, or something like that," answered Tom.

He hesitated; then—

"Mr. Munn, I don't believe Bissel will ever catch the men who've been raiding San Marcos."

"You don't?" said Munn quickly.

"No," said Tom, shaking his head. "But I believe I will."

"You!" ejaculated the superintendent.

"I wouldn't be surprized," said Tom. "I'll come pretty close to it, anyway. I believe that."

"Would you mind saying what you know, or intend to do?" suggested the superintendent.

"I'd rather not just now," replied Crane. "Maybe later," He deliberated a bit. "I'd like to ask you not to say anything about it to the police department," he said then. "Let Bissel work it his way and let me work it my way. We'll see how things come out. Would you do that?"

"Well," said Munn slowly. "Well—yes, I'll agree." He cleared his throat. "Foolishness, probably."

Crane smiled amiably. "I think not."

Munn was considering him quizzically.

"But, granting that either you or Bissel will solve the San Marcos affair, what will you do then?" he asked. "Leave?"

"Let's not say anything about that for the present," returned Crane. His smile widened. "Maybe when I've cleared up things at San Marcos you'll be wanting to offer me a better job!"

"Humph!" said Superintendent Munn.

EXPRESS MESSENGER WATRISS was awakened by the persistent ringing of the telephone in his room in the Shannon; the Shannon being the modest Carbon City hotel where Watriss put up between runs. As the greater part of his running was done at night it follows that the greater part of his sleeping was done day-times. The alarm clock beside his bed was set for nine P.M. Watriss looked at the time-piece as he crawled out of bed; it showed four P.M. Muttering, he took down the receiver.

"Hello," he said, not too pleasantly.

"Want to see you," said a thick, heavy voice. "Can you come down?"

"Oh, it's you," quickly answered Watriss, obviously recognizing the other speaker. "I've been sleeping; the phone woke me up. Anything important?"

"You might call it that."

"Why not come up?

"Be wiser not. You drop into Henry's in about a half hour. I'll be there."

"I get you. Good-by," said Watriss. He hung up and set about dressing.

"The sly old fool," he grumbled. "Be just as safe for him to come here as for me to go to Henry's joint. Somebody's more liable to see us together there than here. Oh, well, these bulls get funny ideas."

A little time later he issued from the hotel and made his way to Henry's—an unpretentious café located in a quiet eddy back of Carbon City's main thoroughfare. He entered and at a table in a far corner he espied Officer Bissel. Watriss made his way there and sat down.

"What's the news?" he said.

"I've got the keys now," said Bissel at once. "I'll be in there every night, beginning tonight. As soon as you're ready you can shoot." He spoke not at all furtively; but his voice was low-pitched.

"That's the stuff," said Watriss. "No more hit and miss, eh?"

"No," returned the officer. He made a slight expression of irritation. "Four times in, and not once right. But that's ended; I'll not need to tumble up the office any more—or break any windows. I can go in now whenever I want; on legitimate business—looking for burglars!" He laughed.

"Too bad you weren't there night before last instead of last night," said Watriss. "I had a proper bunch of the stuff then. One hundred and fifty thousand."

Bissel's eyes gleamed for a moment.

"Ha!" he said swiftly. It was like an exclamation of deep chagrin. "And last night you had nothing?"

Watriss shook his head. "Nothing worth while. Just a few thousands."

"We missed it that time," said Bissel, with something like a sigh. "But the next time we'll not," he added. "You let Sperry know. I'll be on the job; you can depend on that."

Watriss nodded assent. They looked toward the door as five or six patrons entered. Bissel made an abrupt movement and touched Watriss' arm.

"See that last fellow in? That's Crane, agent at San Marcos."

"I know him," replied Watriss. "I used to be on a local run that stopped there every day."

He watched Crane sit down at a table at the far side of the room. By slightly turning his head the agent could have looked directly at the pair, but apparently he had not noticed them.

Bissel was frowning.

"A fresh young guy!" he said. He seemed to hesitate, then continued. "He had me worried some today."

"How was that?" asked Watriss.

"I tossed up things in his depot last night, you know. But this morning he didn't wire in to the office about it. I began to get uneasy; thought he might accidently have found something out. You can be sure I kept my eye peeled. Sure enough, here he came in on Number Sixty-six. I held him up, but he wouldn't say anything about his business. Sassy as the ——. He went up to Munn's office, me trailing. Didn't know what to do, but finally decided I'd bust in on 'em and see what they were talking about. It took some crust, but I did it. As far as I could learn everything was all right though. Crane had just come in to report personally to Munn it seems. I saw my chance and bounced 'em about giving me a set of the station-keys. They tumbled right off, and as soon as I got the keys I beat it."

"You don't think he's wise to anything then?"

"Not a bit," said Bissel with assurance.

"Well, that's good," said the express messenger. "But I expect it'll be just as well to put the thing through just as soon as we can, eh?"

"Sure. First chance. Tonight, if you happen to have it."

"Anything over a hundred thousand?"

"Right. It's got to be worth while."

"You said it. And I'll join you in little old Mex afterward. I've got the substitute package all ready; wrapped, tied and sealed—junk! All I'll have to do will be write on it the same address as the one we want shows. I ought to get around twelve hours clear start; you a few hours more than that. That should be plenty. It looks good; let's try not to gum it up."

"We'll not gum it," declared Bissel. "Here's one *hombre* who'll be over the border before sunup. You'll come and get yours there, of course. We'll mail Sperry his."

"That's the dope," said Watriss. He rose. "Well, I'll drift. Keep on your toes. So-long."

He went out. A few minutes later Bissel saw Crane leave, and not long afterward the officer himself departed.

AFTER leaving Superintendent Munn's office, Crane for a time dallied about the Carbon City depot. Presently he saw Officer Bissel walk through the entrance and start down the street. Tom debated, then followed.

"Might as well keep looking around," he decided. "You never know what you'll see."

After making several turns Crane saw the officer enter a door above which a sign read "Henry's Café." Tom lingered on the opposite side of the street for probably five minutes while a number of other persons passed in and out of the door. Then entered one he recognized; a slender, thin-faced, spry man.

"Messenger Watriss," said Tom to himself. "Used to be on Number Ninety-One. *Ummh!* Understand he's on Number Seven now. Seven leaves Carbon City around eleven P.M. Wonder if this might mean anything."

Tom waited outside a few minutes more, then himself entered Henry's place, unobtrusively easing in behind several other patrons. Watriss and Bissel were seated together in a corner. Tom saw that with eyes that appeared to see nothing. He selected his own place and sat down.

"I'm much intrigued," he cogitated.

He ordered a bite to eat, then set himself to mastication and reflection. Without once looking directly in their direction he nevertheless perceived that Watriss and Bissel were engaged in apparently casual conversation.

"Too casual," ruminated Tom. "Poor teamwork. When one is serious the other smiles. Then *vice versa*—too regular."

With deliberation he nonchalantly munched his food. Yet his brain was busy—pulling apart details, piecing details together. And by the time he saw Watriss leave he had made up his mind as to one thing. Directly he himself arose and went out, leaving Bissel still at the table in the corner.

When Crane for the second time that day entered Superintendent Munn's office he was pleased to find that the official had not yet gone.

"Would you like to have an evening's good entertainment?" said Crane as he stepped in.

Munn looked a trifle astonished. He noticed that the agent's face was soberly serious; but a high light was dancing in Crane's eyes.

"Just what do you mean?" asked Munn.

"An evening's diversion," insisted Tom. "It'll be interesting, I think. Perhaps even more than I think. Better come along and enjoy a few hours away from dull care. We'll be adventurers and spy upon the wicked."

Something seemed to stir in Munn, something in him seemed to respond to the appeal of this gay and handsome youth. His own eyes sparkled.

"If you'll promise not to lead me into paths which a sedate man should be wary of?" he said.

"I'll do that," answered Tom promptly. "Don't worry along that line. And you must promise to sort of let me take the lead, you know; and if I don't answer fully all your questions please don't be offended. I'd rather let things unravel as we go. You'll find it worth while, or I'm mighty much mistaken."

"Agreed," said Munn succinctly. "What's the first move?"

"We must get to San Marcos *pronto*," said Tom. He looked at the clock on the wall of the superintendent's office. It pointed to five-ten. "Number Three leaves here in twenty minutes, but she isn't scheduled to stop at San Marcos. I'd like to have you give her an order to drop off two passengers there today—the two being you and I."

"The general office doesn't like me to stop Three at points not scheduled," said Munn doubtfully. "Number Sixty-Five leaves at seven. She stops there. Couldn't we wait for her?"

"I'm sorry, but we can't," replied Tom. "We want to get there ahead of Sixty-Five." He knew well that Number Sixty-Five was the last train that night for San Marcos. Consequently he figured that Officer Bissel of necessity would travel on it. And it was no part of his plan to have the officer see Munn and himself journeying together to San Marcos.

"Very well then," said the superintendent with decision. "I'll give Number Three the order.

FROM east to west the E. W. & T. dips in a gentle quarter-circle curve toward the Mexican line. San Marcos lies at the very southernmost point of the dip. A lazy town, dozing in the sun. Five hours tight riding will take a man on horseback from it to the border.

Toward dusk on Wednesday evening Number Three slowed up at San Marcos depot and Munn and Crane dropped off. Without quite stopping Number Three then pulled out and on.

The superintendent and the agent entered the station. Crane closed and locked behind them the waiting-room and office doors. Before the big stationery cupboard which stood in a rear corner of the office he paused. It was a huge cupboard, flat-topped; over seven feet high, fully eight feet wide and almost four feet deep. In it were kept practically all of the station supplies; all manner of forms and sheets on which the station reports were rendered and a varied assortment of other articles. On the flat top reposed a miscellaneous line of things: lanterns, tall bottles of ink, extra lamp-chimneys, two galvanized fire-buckets, a bristly desk-brush, a feather duster, a small brass torch—most of it strung along the edge in imposing array.

"I'll have to dust that up," said Tom, looking at the cupboard's flat top. He smiled at Munn's questioning countenance. "It's to be our observation post," he supplemented.

Tom set to work forthwith. The bottles and buckets and lanterns along the front edge of the cupboard he was religiously careful not to disturb; but the litter behind he cleaned out thoroughly, disposing of it in various drawers and inside on the shelves.

Between the stationery cupboard and the rear window stood a stout stand, to the top of which was secured a heavy iron copy-press that was used when impressions of reports were made. Tom pointed to this when he had finished his cleaning up.

"Think you can make it up on top the cupboard from there?" he asked.

"I expect so," said Munn, plainly puzzled.

"Then after while that's where we'll get," stated Crane. "Be a pretty tight squeeze for the two of us, but I think we can manage."

"Yes?"

"If we stretch out behind that barricade of lanterns, bottles, buckets and so on I don't believe any one ever will see us. We'll have to keep mighty quiet and if anybody comes we'll have to keep quieter than that."

"But what about Bissel?"

"That's it exactly. Bissel above all. He mustn't know we're here; absolutely not."

"I don't quite get you; but I've given you my word. I'll stay mum," said the superintendent.

"Then that's understood," said Tom. "Now let's slip out and find a bite to eat. We want to get back before Number Sixty-Five gets in."

It was gathering dusk when they came back to the station and let themselves into the office. Five minutes later Sixty-Five arrived, paused a few seconds and was gone. The station was dark. From a front window of the office Crane cautiously peeped out. Down at the far end of the platform he could see Officer Bissel's bulky figure.

A few hundred yards west of San Marcos depot stood a distant-signal—a signal which governed the approach of westbound trains to "SM" tower; this latter being a block signal-tower located about three-quarters of a mile west of San Marcos station. When the distant-signal stood at yellow a westbound train could pass it without stopping as it approached the tower. But when the distant-signal stood at red the train was to come to a stop; after which it could at once start on, approaching the tower under full control.

It was toward the distant-signal's light, now glowing yellow in the semi-darkness, that the officer seemed to be gazing while Crane watched him. Bissel stood there for several moments, then crossed the track and disappeared behind some cars standing on a siding.

"Bissel has arrived on Sixty-Five all right," Tom informed Munn as he turned away from the window. "But we needn't get up on our perch yet. I doubt if he comes in for an hour or two. Have a chair. We may as well be comfortable while we can."

But before he himself sat down he went to his desk and took from a drawer a dull-colored, flat, handy pistol. He put it in a side pocket of his coat.

* * *

AT A few minutes past eleven o'clock there was a subdued click at the outside waiting-room door. A few seconds later there was a second click. The door of the silent office swung open and Officer Bissel entered, a small circle of light from an electric pocket-light traveling before him on the floor.

Closing the door, the officer at once moved quickly to the front windows of the office and pulled down the shades. With pins he fastened the edges of the shades close to the window frames, so that no particle of light could have filtered out. Going to the rear window he did the same thing. His movements were swift, confident—like one thoroughly familiar with his surroundings and perfectly certain of his purposes.

The window-blinds fastened to his satisfaction, the railroad policeman next approached the switchboard, his little light still glowing. With the assurance of one entirely at home with such things he picked up the plug attached to the free end of the cord of the telegraph test instrument which stood on the little counter, or shelf, just below the lower edge of the switchboard.

Turning his light on the long row of numbers that extended along this lower edge of the switchboard, he ran it over them until number 236 was revealed—the figures denoting that the wire connected to the switchboard-strip just above went by that number. Each strip or wire in the board had two sides; an east and a west side.

From the east side of 236 Bissel pulled a brass plug, and in the hole in the switchboard from which it had been taken he thrust the plug attached to the test instrument. At the same instant, in the ground wire strip at the top of the switchboard—and which extended from one end to the other of it—he stuck a plug on the west side of 236. The armature on the test instrument closed with a snap.

Placing his flashlight on the narrow counter, Bissel trained its rays so that they illuminated the instrument, then on the latter turned the screw which adjusted the tension of the armature—slowly opening and closing the key meanwhile. The proper tension reached, he grasped the key in a business-like way and made a few swift calls.

"X—X," he called; and then signed: "Y."

Almost immediately came a reply.

"I, Y," tapped the sounder as Bissel held his key closed.

"What's the good word tonight?" asked Bissel then over the wire, his fingers and wrist moving with the rhythm of a professional operator. "Has Number Seven passed yet?"

"Just gone," was the answer. "And the word is good. Boy, W has got the stuff tonight! Something to make your eyes pop!"

"Fine!" said Bissel. For an instant his hand seemed to tremble on the key, as if from excitement. "Fine!" he repeated then. "I'll be waiting."

"Good," spelled the sounder. "W said to tell you to be on the jump."

"I will be," flashed Bissel. "Count on it. Good-by. I must get out to that signal."

"O. K.," said the other. "Good luck."

Bissel waited for no more. He jerked out the ground plug, jerked out the plug attached to the instrument cord and closed the wire as it had been. He took the pins from the window-shades at the front of the office and raised them to their former position. He did the same at the rear. He paused a moment and swept his light around the office as if to assure himself that everything was as it had been when he entered. Then swiftly he went out the office door and closed it. The waiting-room door opened, shut. The station was silent.

There was a stir on the top of the big cupboard in San Marcos depot. A guarded voice spoke, in a rushing whisper.

"Crane! What in the ——'s name does all this mean?" There was the sound of a man sitting up.

"Something big," said Crane's voice. "Something plenty big, you can be sure. I'll confess I'm a little astonished myself. Careful now. Don't knock any of these buckets and things down. Here, slide off this way. Easy. That's the trick. Now you're down."

Together the agent and the superintendent stood on the office floor. Munn was clutching Tom's arm and breathing fast.

"What do you make of it, Crane?" he demanded. "Of course I got what went over the wire; I'm an old dispatcher."

"First," replied Tom at once," Officer Bissel is not all that he seems to be. Or, rather, he's more than he seems to be. Second, he was talking to Operator Sperry at Bradley Junction. How do I know this? I'll explain.

"I know wire 236. It's a commercial and doesn't run into any office between here and Carbon City except Bradley Junction. Also Number Seven stops at the Junction; due there at eleven-ten. It was almost exactly eleven-fifteen I figure when Bissel cut in on the wire. Then, Operator Sperry is third trick man at Bradley Junction; goes on at eleven even.

"How would they risk talking on 236? Easy. Bissel puts on a ground west here. Sperry has a ground on east there. With both sides cut off and nobody between they've got an exclusive wire, very private and confidential. Say anything and no other office will hear. Oh, yes, and Sperry would put battery on at his place. He's got it there. Have to do that, of course."

"But what stuff were they talking about? And who is W? And what signal?" Munn shot the questions out, almost dancing up and down in his excitement.

"I've a pretty good notion as to what the stuff is," said Tom evenly. "You'll likely see for yourself later. And I think I know who W is. I'll tell you that later. And as for the signal, I'll tell you that now. I'm pretty near sure it's this distant-signal out here. Let's go see. Number Seven will be showing up in about ten minutes and we'll have to be there."

He started from the office at once, Munn by his side. They stepped out of the waiting-room and Tom came to a pause.

"A couple things more," he warned "Step light, be quiet and keep to the shadows. The sky's just right; not too dark and not too light—but be careful. Now come on. Stick close and don't whoop 'er up till you get my cue."

It was his superintendent he was talking to. But Tom never turned a hair about that; he was captain on this expedition.

With a cunning that would have done credit to a couple of professional night-owls they slid down the track toward the distant-signal gleaming yellow in the night. Every dark spot was used to advantage. And presently they stood behind a low-growing bush along the right-of-way, not over thirty yards from the base of the signal.

A mile or two to the east Number Seven's deep-toned whistle sounded. And at the same moment Tom and Munn perceived that a man was mounting the iron ladder that led from the ground up the signal mast to the light some thirty feet above the rails. The man's body was outlined against the faintly luminous sky.

"Bissel!" whispered Munn in Crane's ear.

The officer reached the top of the ladder and for a little time they could see him fumbling about the signal arm. Then he appeared to pull down on something; and abruptly the signal arm fell to a horizontal position, the glowing light switched from yellow to red.

A little more fumbling, and Bissel started to descend. The light remained at red. Number Seven whistled for the San Marcos crossing as the officer regained the ground.

Rip-roaring, the night express came down the track. Then suddenly her steam was shut off; the brakes flew on. Indignant, she slid to a stop at the distant-signal.

"Now watch!" spoke Tom Crane to his superintendent.

They saw Bissel's dark form dash past them. The door of the express car, second from the engine, slid partly open. An oblong of light, a foot wide and seven high, stood out sharply in the car. An express messenger, crouching, was clearly visible in the opening. Bissel's head popped into the oblong of light. He reached up his arms. From messenger to officer a compact square bundle was passed.

"Beat it!" said the messenger's voice. The express car door was thrust shut. With sharp, explosive exhausts Number Seven's engine slowly put momentum into the heavy coaches.

From Munn's and Crane's sheltering bush to the express car door was but a half-dozen paces. As the car door closed Tom darted forward.

"We'll whoop 'er up now!" he called to Munn.

Bissel, the quarry, was streaking it toward the rear of the train. Twenty steps, and Tom was upon him.

"Touchdown!" cried Tom as he leaped. "I want that ball now!"

Officer and agent crashed to the earth together—a breath-taking bump. The policeman was like a wildcat. He kicked, bit, scratched, twisted. The rear coaches of the departing train revealed a savage battle. Tom held on. The package at the first fall had shot out of Bissel's arms.

The officer squirmed free. He sprang to his feet and pulled a pistol from his clothes. But Tom, observing, unexpectedly swung his foot and the gun flew from Bissel's fingers; a grunt of pain came from the officer's lips.

"This has gone far enough," said Crane, and drew his own pistol. "Will you agree?"

The last lights on Number Seven's train passed by and faded out. But Bissel's hands were in the air.

"Crane!" It was Munn's voice inquiring round, much after the manner of an old cluck with one chick. "Crane!"

"Present," said Tom. "Right this way, sir."

The superintendent drew near to the two dim figures standing beside the track, his heavy breathing clearly audible.

"Mr. Bissel has decided not to run away like that," said Tom as Munn came up. "Please go through his pockets and see if you can find that daisy little flashlight, the one he had down in my office. You're perfectly safe. He hasn't any gun and I've got mine."

The superintendent did as requested and almost at once brought forth the light. He snapped it on.

"You might pick up that package," directed Crane. "There, over to your left. Read what's written on it."

Munn lifted the paper-wrapped bundle and held it in the light of the torch. His head bobbed suddenly down closer to the parcel, as if some magnet there had drawn it. For a moment he seemed to find difficulty in speaking.

"The—the what bank is that?" he muttered incredulously. "San Francisco!" And then in a sort of rushing gasp: "One hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars!"

The bundle almost dropped from Munn's hands. He swerved the light on to Bissel's sullen, working countenance. He stood staring at the officer.

SUPERINTENDENT MUNN on Thursday morning sat looking across his desk at Tom Crane. His eyes were now warm with reflection, now warm with approbation.

"It seems incredible," said the superintendent slowly. "And yet I saw it with my own eyes. I know it's true. Then there's Bissel and Watriss and Sperry, all rounded up and in proper hands; and the bundle of cash safely on its way again."

"I'm glad," observed Tom, "that you found the evening interesting and worth while. As I promised, we spied upon the wicked and we ourselves did not stray from the narrow way."

"I wouldn't have missed it," declared Munn. "You managed it wonderfully well. You displayed great observation—great ability." He paused to regard Crane attentively. "The E. W. & T. needs men of ability."

"Most roads do," mumbled Tom.

Munn all at once leaned back and laughed aloud. Then abruptly he got up and walked around his desk to where the somewhat surprized Tom sat. His hand fell on Crane's shoulder.

"Son," said the superintendent, "you're a winner. You called the turn! Leave San Marcos if you want. But I'm offering you that better job!"

"So?" said Tom, now grinning himself.

"Sure!" said Munn. "And you're going to accept. You're coming in here with me!"

TO SHED BLOOD *

by

KONRAD BERCOVICI

Author of "Vlad's Son," "The Bear-Tamer's Daughter," etc.

I WAS eighteen years old and had been disappointed in my first love. I had been shamelessly betrayed for Rita, my sister's best friend, who came to play four-hand piano arrangements with me almost daily, became engaged to my oldest brother when I had just mustered sufficient courage and decided to declare myself to her. For weeks and weeks I had secretly rehearsed the little speech I intended to deliver impromptu and then, instead of that, I had to offer my congratulations.

I shall never forget the roguish smile of the treacherous woman when she kissed me that night. The mockery in her eye, the patronizing voice, and the laughter of my sister when Rita said to me—

"But you must continue to play four-hand arrangements with me or I shall break the engagement with your brother."

My brother too laughed giddily at first, but my eyes sobered him and, putting his arms around me, he said, "Poor boy!" and I could see that he was angry with his fiancée for having played the game so unfairly with me. The others thought that Rita had been very clever.

It was an open secret in the house that she had been exchanging love notes with my brother in the last year. Only my sister was fooled. She did not know of the matter until my brother announced the engagement. Because of some family affair the love between the two had had to be kept unknown from the others.

* *This is an Off-the-Trail Story. See first contents page*

It was a Summer night when the engagement was celebrated. The guests had assembled in the *giambic* of our house, an upper terrace commanding a view of the Danube, and there the dancing and singing and drinking had gone on for hours and hours. For in Rumania engagements are celebrated with even greater pomp and lavishness than weddings. My glass was kept full by my brother, who urged me to drink and kissed and begged me to forgive him.

"Little brother, little brother, I did not know. I swear I did not know it would hurt you so much. Let's drink that glass together. Show me you are not angry with me."

And I drank after him and sang and danced and played and made believe that I was happy. But after the guests had departed, in the small hours of the morning when the candles in the colored-paper lanterns that hung on wires had flickered their last, I loosened the little boat moored to a ring in the outer wall and crossed the Danube to the Dobrudja side of the river.

I had planned it all while I danced and sang. Murdo's Gipsy tribe had crossed the river the previous day. Murdo and I were old friends. I intended to persuade him to accept me as one of his subjects. He and my father had been old friends. I wanted to leave behind me a civilization that had hurt me. I had lost faith in it. And I had always admired the Gipsies and their carefree roving across the world. I was eighteen and had been disappointed in love.

"And what will the 'Cucoana,' your mother, say?" questioned Murdo when I had finished telling my story and asked him to take me along on his travels. "No, no! I know your brother. That hot-headed son of your father will come with gun and dagger and fight and stir trouble."

"Murdo," I answered, "he will not. I have left a note for him in my room. He knows that I shall go with you."

The old Gipsy looked at me in silence for a while; then he said pensively:

"We shall remain here the whole day. From your *giambic* they will see your boat. Some one will come to take it back. We shall have speech then. Not before."

As I left the Gipsy chief to shake hands with his men who had come to greet me I saw a boat coming across the river. I soon recognized my brother in it and sat down to wait for him near Murdo, who also watched the boat that was being tossed by the foaming waves. When it had landed on the soft sand the chief went to shake hands with his visitor.

My brother came to where I was sitting, put his hands on my shoulders and said—

"Poor boy, poor boy."

His eyes were red and wet. I could see that he had not slept and had racked his soul. But then, Rita was a beautiful girl, and I myself would have sacrificed the happiness of a dozen brothers for one single kiss from her lips.

We shook hands without another word while Murdo and the others looked on. Then my brother put some money in my coat-pockets, shook hands with the chief, fastened the little boat in which I had come to his boat and rowed back home, home to mother and sister and Rita, to the four-hand music parties on the terrace, the books and card games, lampion festas and open-air concerts which he instigated and lorded over as the leader of the younger set.

"And now we go!" Murdo roused me from my revery. "Hurry! Jump in near Ghitza on his wagon. The sun is high and Cerna Voda is far. Hurry!"

There were about sixty souls, all told, in Murdo's tribe. Twelve canvas-covered wagons traveled in single file, four horses to each wagon. Tied to the shafts of each vehicle another fifty vehicles trailed along. Behind the caravan, on the sides and fronting it, a dozen long-coated shepherd dogs and brown *ogars*, wolf-hounds, footed silently about the village on wheels as it serpentined on the winding dusty narrow dirt road leading through the deserts of the Dobrudjan marshlands.

A dull sun was cutting its way painfully through leaden clouds. A hot wind laden with vapors of decaying vegetation was blowing against us. The wagon to which I was assigned was the second one of the long file, the first one being Murdo's, and I was sitting near Ghitza, who drove the horses. Within the wagon was the driver's family: his wife and three children, among them Ileana, his oldest daughter.

At sundown Murdo checked his horses and the caravan came to a sudden halt. The wagons were brought up to a wide square allowing plenty of grazing for the horses. The dogs were fed and while the children jumped out from the rear of the canvas homes, like frogs from a pond, the women hung kettles on iron triangles, the older girls went to fetch water in their wooden pails and the boys entered the near-by forest in search of dry wood with which to start the fire.

I was new to all this and therefore the only idle one among the people. As I watched them work I became conscious of my idle hands that now hung limply at my sides. It seemed to me that they had grown immeasurably long and conscious.

"Hey, what's that?" thundered Murdo as he came nearer. "Ghitza, do you think he is lame or blind, this boy here? I heard your axle squeaking on the way. Grease the wheels. Let him help you grease the wheels. We have a long journey before us tomorrow."

A little later, after helping grease the wheels, I squatted down near Ghitza to eat the hot corn and the strip of smoked pork his wife had served on big vine leaves. After the meal we gathered around the fire in a semicircle to listen to the story of a blind Tatar who had strayed from a neighboring village.

I did not understand what he said, but it must have been a sad tale for the women cried and the men puffed furiously at their pipes. At the end of the tale Murdo looked to where I was sitting and I suddenly became the object of the attention of the whole tribe. Then I understood. The old Tatar had told a story of unrequited love. And, as they all knew why I was with them, there was compassion in their eyes.

"Let's sing," said Murdo. "Sorrow is like a worm. It goes to the core of the apple and the fruit ripens and falls before it is full grown. Let's sing to close our hearts to the worm."

AND I sang with them, and when they danced I danced with them, and before the fire had died out I was talking to Ileana, bare-footed and barearmed Ileana, who had danced a "Khindia" with me.

"Dance," said Murdo, "is the song of the body. The body is the song of life. And life is the song of God."

On the following day when I had reached Cerna Voda Murdo took me along to the mayor, where my ability to write was made use of.

"Hey," said the mayor, "I see you have your own *scribbar* now. Is he one of your people?"

"One of ours," Murdo lied. "He has gone to school in Braila and knows the 'bookies' like a lawyer."

"That's good," said the old mayor patronizingly as he looked over the petition for a permit I had just filled out. "He knows; he knows. And I suppose he will not stay long with you now? He will want to go back to town, settle!"

"Not he!" answered Murdo, looking at me. "He will remain with us."

"As fate should want," the mayor added.

Then we went to the inn and drank new wine. A little later the horses were driven to the fair, and the peasants, the Rumanians in coarse, flowing, heavy, white, long shirts reaching to their feet and the Tartars in heavy red *plidas*, like the trousers of Zouaves, and big black fur caps on their pear-shaped heads, came to look the animals over.

It was a busy day. The bargaining was long and arduous. The wit of the Gipsies and the cunning of the peasants were in continual play. And while the men bargained and haggled and cursed and shook hands the dogs turned around in circles, their tongues hanging heavily from parched mouths and their eyes shifting from man to beast, watching the strangers. Each dog watched his masters' horses and allowed them to be taken by the new owner only after he had seen with his own eyes the Gipsy handing the halter-rope to the other man.

I was kept busy giving the bills of sale required by the law. I heard Murdo praise himself that he had his own *scribbar* now and no longer needed the village *scribbar;* the drunken old notary who eyed me with hatred when he saw me passing by.

Part of that night was spent in the inn to drink good luck with all the buyers. I don't know how I came there, but in the early hours of the morning I woke to find myself under Ghitza's wagon, my head resting on the haunches of a big wolfhound. My clothes were unspeakably dirty and greasy, my hands were full of mud and I had lost my hat somewhere.

I crawled out from between the wheels, a little dizzy yet, but at ease and already feeling that I was an integral part of the caravan.

I found Murdo and Ghitza bathing the horses in the river near the camp.

"Whoa, hey you! The others are sleeping. Help bathe the horses," called the chief to me.

Soon Ileana appeared and rode out into the water farther than I had dared. I edged the horse I was riding close to hers.

"You must never get drunk again," she said to me. "For if you do Costa will stab you when you are asleep."

"And who is Costa?" I asked. "And why should he stab me when I sleep?"

"Because you danced with me last night. There he comes now."

I looked around. A dark and slender boy of my own age was wading in the river and as he passed by us he stretched the long leather tongue of his short-handled whip as if it was meant to urge the horses, but in reality he aimed the lash at my face.

"Are you blind?" I yelled, veering my horse toward him, holding a hand to my face where the tip of the whip had touched it.

"No. I am not," he shot back, looking over my head to the girl.

"Then I'll blind you if you try that trick again," I yelled.

"Look at that *scribbar!* Look at him!" laughed Costa as he looked at me in scorn.

By that time Murdo and Ghitza and a few others had surrounded us.

"You leave him alone," ordered Ghitza. "He has not come with us to fight. He has come to live in peace."

As he spoke he looked at Murdo who watched me closely.

"He is not afraid of Costa, Ghitza; I know he is not. I know his blood. And let them have it out right now," the chief said. "Get off your horses and to the shore, both of you!"

I was so excited that I landed the first blow as soon as the circle was formed around us. We fought bare-handed. There were no rules to be observed. It was: hit how and where you can! We fought and wrestled while the others urged us on. It did not take me very long to have the best of the scramble.

Costa was bleeding when they took him away from me. Ileana brought water and helped stanch the blood from an ugly gash in my chin. Costa had sunk his teeth there while laying under me.

"You are strong," Ileana said to me. "But Costa will stab you just the same. You are careless."

"Let him try; let him try!" I answered as I washed my face.

"You have no dagger. I shall give you mine." And quickly, before I knew from where, she put a small, fine-bladed dagger in my belt.

WE WENT to the fair again with our horses that day. Whatever difference had existed between the Gipsies and myself had been bridged by my fight with Costa. The sun had baked my face brown, and as I had lost one of my shoes in the river I was bare-footed like most other Tziganes.

No one questioned about my not being a Gipsy and I was flattered to hear the peasants call me—

"Hey, Tzigane, scribbler, come here and make out the bill of sale."

Even the dogs accepted me and no longer eyed me with suspicion when I rode a horse to show off its advantages to a possible buyer.

That night I did not tarry at the inn with the others. I was the only male in the camp. The feel of my dagger's point, which I had inspected closely, made me proud and savagely ready to use it should occasion offer.

After the meal which I ate with Ghitza's household Ileana sat down by me near the camp-fire.

"They say you left your home because of a girl," she said. "Is she very beautiful?"

"Yes," I answered, and actually saw Rita again in the filmy Parisian gown she had worn a few nights before. "More beautiful than—" I continued dreamily.

"Then why did you fight Costa?"

"Because he insulted me."

"Oh!" she exclaimed and, leaping on her feet, she was away in an instant.

Only once before had I seen such graceful and swift running. It was when a chamois had been badly scared in the mountains.

A few hours later, Murdo, headed by fiddlers who sang and played as they marched, followed by the rest of the male population of his tribe, returned noisily to the camp. I was still sitting by the camp-fire.

"Hey—you! All alone? Where is Ileana?" he thundered, laughing broadly. "Where is Ileana?" they all asked in chorus as they approached nearer, and even the fiddlers pointed their bows at me and asked, "Where is Ileana?" as they staggered on their feet.

"How should I know?" I answered moodily without getting up.

"He — can't — throw —me —again, that scribbler," Costa drawled. "That scribbler who fights like a woman—with bare hands."

"Check your tongue," cried Murdo to the boy as he pushed him aside when I rose to my feet. The chief was again sober. And, turning to the fiddlers, he said: "Your night is full. I have paid you. Go!" And when the fiddlers had gone he said to his men: "Go! leave us alone."

"Son of Jancu," he spoke softly as he sat near me. "Son of Jancu, sorrow is like a worm. It eats out the heart and the apple falls to the ground before it is ripe and is eaten by swine. I can hear your father, who was my friend, telling me, 'Murdo, he is my son. You are old and know his heart.' You shall stay with us. Your father has told me many a time, during the long Winter nights in which I smoked my pipe sitting near him by the fire-place of his big house, your father has told me many a time, 'I have built a big house for myself, but I feel as if in a prison in it.' So he has told me. And your women are treacherous and want silks and jewels. But you, I have known your being nursed by one of our own women. You have drawn of our blood from her breasts. It flows in you. You will forget the other woman. Just be like a son to me, Son of Jancu, to Murdo, who has lost his son who died because of his love for one of your women. Sorrow had eaten his heart."

I did not answer, for as he spoke I saw myself seated again at the piano near Rita and felt the warmth of her arm as it touched mine while we played.

"Why did you fight Costa?" Murdo asked suddenly after a long silence.

"Because he insulted me," I answered slowly, wondering why he should have asked what he knew as well as I did.

We sat silently facing each other for a while.

"Now, go to sleep in my wagon. There are blankets a-plenty and tomorrow you drive my horses."

We were up and on the road to Constanza early the following morning. Murdo sat by me on the driver's seat and pointed the way at the cross-roads. About noon I began to look back trying to see Ileana. I just caught a glimpse of her during the evening when she had gone to fetch water for the meal. I made as if to follow her, but Murdo called me to help him grease the wheels and kept me busy the whole evening. I was too tired to eat and fell asleep as soon as the work was done.

On the following day we were again on the road at sunrise. And as our wagon was the first one I had no chance to see Ileana while on the road. Neither had I seen her that morning before the caravan had started. The farther we went the more the past receded from me and instead of thinking of Rita and my brother I pictured to myself the Gipsy girl in the company of Costa, playing and kissing with each other. Suffocating with jealousy, I began to drive the horses faster than their usual pace.

"Hey, if you feel like murdering some one, don't take it out on my horses," taunted Murdo as he took the reins out of my hands.

Again I caught a glimpse of Ileana that night as we made camp. She was coming from the river, carrying two wooden pails, tilted backward as she walked, with feet wide apart. There was a red flower in her black hair that hung loosely over her bare, brown, broad shoulders, and there was a bunch of white lilies in the narrow yellow sash that held the two loose halves of her knee-short skirts together.

I dropped the hammer out of my hand, ready to have a word with her; but Murdo was with me and we were busy straightening an axle.

"Hey, you! Stay here," he ordered. "Don't run away when there is work to be done."

My hands itched for the dagger when I saw Costa running to help Ileana carry the water. He took one of the pails from her hands and she slowed her pace and rested every few steps as they talked together softly.

It took them so long to reach Ghitza's camp-fire that I heard the mother curse and call her daughter snail and cursed Costa for keeping her husband and children hungry while the wood burned to ashes and the kettle was empty.

Costa passed by me and grinned when I looked at him.

The following day was Sunday. They all

put on their best clothes. I had no Sunday wear. After the midday meal they all went to the inn. I could hear the dance music. My feet would not keep still. I wanted to dance, to sing, I wanted to dance with Ileana. I had to stay around the camp. I could not show myself in my ragged clothes on a Sunday at the inn. I was hatless, barefooted, in rags. I raged myself to sleep.

A few hours later Murdo returned to the camp. He was not drunk. He never was. He was happy, gay, full of mischief.

"Why did you fight Costa?" he asked as he roused me from a half-stupor.

"Because of Ileana," I answered quickly.

"That's good, my son," he laughed. "Come, I have clothes for you and boots of Russian leather, and a fine shirt of borangick and a red sash—none better to be found on this or the other shore of the Danube."

I was at the inn before Murdo. They were dancing the Hora. Locked arm in arm in a wide circle they danced round and round. The musicians were seated upon chairs on a table in the middle of the circle. Ileana's right arm was locked in Costa's left and her left arm was in her father's. I broke the hold between her and Costa and inserted my left arm in hers and the right one in the Gipsy's. Then they all began to yell—

"Look at the scribbler!"

"Hey, why did you fight Costa?" yelled Murdo, laughing, and gulping the contents of a huge pitcher he held to his mouth.

"Yes—why did you?" they all laughed and yelled as the dance went on.

"Why did you?" the fiddlers joined the chorus as they leaned their heads on their violins and scraped vigorously on the strings.

Ileana blushed crimson when I looked at her flushed and embarrassed by the sudden attention of all. She squeezed my arm and I responded.

SUDDENLY I felt as if a heavy weight had fallen on the back of my neck. The world was blurred, my knees sagged and the earth slipped from under my feet.

When I opened my eyes I was in Murdo's tent, the old chief was standing over me and near him was Ileana. I closed my eyes again and dreamt I danced with a girl whose face was half Ileana's and half the other one's and I begged her to be all one or the other.

I must have slept many hours, for when I woke again I felt a sharp pain in my neck.

"Don't move your head," Murdo called to me. "You will be well soon, son. I was afraid you would never come to. But you will be well. We must leave now. For I don't want the *gendarmes* to hear of what has happened. You will settle that yourself when you are well. Ileana will stay near you now. Keep still. Don't move your head too much. It will heal."

No matter how many blankets I was bedded on the hobbling over the cobblestone road gave me terrible pains. When we had struck a soft dirt road and the going was easy I called to Ileana:

"What has happened? Tell me."

"You were foolish to do what you did. When you turned to speak to me Costa stabbed you in the neck. I don't know that I ought to love you, you are so careless!"

"He is a coward. Only a coward strikes from behind."

"He loves me," the Gipsy girl defended her tribesman.

"But I also love you, Ileana," I stammered.

"Why did not you tell me so when I asked why you fought Costa? You said you fought him only because he had insulted you," the Gipsy girl retorted angrily.

"I—I—I—I did not know—then, Ileana."

"Now you shall have to fight it out all over again and Costa is quick as lightning. They are all afraid of him; all the other boys. They never come near me; he is so quick, so quick, like lightning, they are all afraid of him."

"I will slow him up when I get well, Ileana."

She put her hand in mine. For a full week we traveled to put distance between our caravan and rumors that might set the *gendarmes*, eager for justice and bribes, on our trail. I was as anxious that we should get away from such trouble as they were. It was, after all, my own affair. And most of the day Ileana was near me. Instead of going to Constanza we drove inland toward the Tatars living in small hamlets between the arteries through which the Danube flows into the Black Sea.

On Sunday we were safe among the Tatars. *Gendarmes* would never dare to come for any man in those marshes. Murdo looked at my rapidly healing wound and helped me get into the new clothes. I was pale and drawn.

"Look out for yourself," the Gipsy teased me good-naturedly. "You are so pale the Tatars here might take you for a woman dressed in man's clothes."

I wrote home to my mother a few days later and rode to post the letter in the nearest post-office, in Chilia, some twenty miles from where we had camped. Ileana rode near me. She was afraid Costa might attack me and I was not well enough to fight him.

"But do you think he is such a disgusting coward?" I asked the girl.

"He loves me, *scribbar;* he loves me," she repeated. "And he would do anything. Wouldn't you?"

We rode in silence the rest of the way and back again. I thought of the life people live in towns. The prisons people call homes, the intrigues, the superficialities, the formalism and the whole fabric of the relation between civilized man. I thought of all that and compared it to the free, simple and beautiful life of the Gipsies.

What was the other one, Rita, in comparison with Ileana? Shallow and treacherous. She had intimidated me so that I had never dared declare myself and while flirting with me, without regard, without shame, she had worked upon my brother's sentiments. But the simple child of the open was openhearted. It had been entirely my fault, I reflected, blinded by my training and education as I still was, that I had not "seen" her and responded to her love the moment she had first looked at me.

Let him have Rita; let him have the house and its walls I knew better. I was striking a better bargain with life. Murdo was right. Houses were prisons. And Ileana was beautiful. A thousand times more beautiful than any other woman I had seen. I only began to appreicate the cleanliness of her thin limbs and the smooth roundness of her brown arms. And that delicate roundness of her small breasts that held away the shirt from the powerful throat that blended so swiftly to the sharp line of her chin! Where was there a woman to compare with her? Those eyes! The long eyebrows and the luscious velvety lashes that shaded them. And the lips, the teeth! I'd fight a dozen Costas for her. A dozen or a hundred.

I put my arms around Ileana, who rode near me, and wanted to kiss her.

"Not before you have fought Costa," she told me, drawing away.

"But, Ileana! Don't you love me?"

"Yes, *scribbar*. But there is Costa—and you are careless."

I understood.

AT THE end of that week Murdo looked at my wound and declared it had healed completely.

"We must go away from here. The Tatars have no money to buy horses and want too much money for their animals," Murdo told me.

"Well, what prevents us from going? I am well again."

"Yes, but there is Costa!"

"Well? What of him? I am not afraid."

"You shall have to fight it out again. It's better you should finish your quarrel here, before we leave. Here no one interferes. There are no *gendarmes*, no police. I must think of my tribe, *scribbar*. Let's see your dirk. Good!"

Then he left the wagon to make arrangements. A few minutes later Ileana came.

"Tonight. On the rock that rises from the river. Come with me to see it now."

The top of the rock rising from the river was about a hundred feet over the water—the top was smooth as a table of stone. It formed a rough platform of about fifteen feet each way.

"You must come early in the evening and choose your position. You must not have the moon in your face. It will blind you," she told me. She nestled close to me, kissed me and cried, "Oh, why after you had beaten him with bare fists did you not tell me you fought because of me? Why? Why? It would have been all over then. You had beaten him and I was yours. Now it is as if you had never beaten him for I told him that you had fought only because he had insulted you."

According to the Gipsy code my quarrel with Costa really dated from the Sunday in which I had broken into the dance.

Murdo kept me near him the rest of the afternoon. He talked to me of future plans, of fitting out a wagon for me and Ileana, of letting me handle the money and making me chief because there was no issue of his loins alive.

"I want you to know all the good things you are fighting for. The stake is not only a woman. It is a kingdom. For we reign over the fairs of many lands," the chief impressed upon me. "And I like you better than I do Costa. One of you is too many."

As I left the camp, when night had settled, I was closely followed by Ileana. Suddenly she yelled—

"Run, run, run, *scribbar;* run to the rock."

I ran toward the rock as fast as I could and she followed at my heels. I was the first to reach the top. There was only one narrow path that led there. She followed me breathlessly and I helped her up on the platform. Costa had just begun to climb the rock.

"Good. Now you have the better position. Keep yourself ready. He will strike as soon as he lands on the platform. Stand in the center: like this. Back him to the edge. Don't let him turn you. And watch his eyes. He knows how to make them squint and he will fool you," Ileana advised me rapidly.

"Good-luck, *scribbar,*" she yelled, retreating as Costa leaped upon the platform.

I had the better position. The moon's light was in my favor. I had a kingdom to fight for. All the savagery of the caveman possessed me in that minute. I had never before fought with a knife for life and death, but the handle of the dagger in my hand bridged the many centuries separating me from my ancestors in the caves of Mesopotamia.

With my left hanging limply I followed my advantage and pressed him to the edge of the rock. His dagger fell out from his limp fingers. The moon shone full upon his face. It was pale green and the whites of his eyes were wide with fear. I put my hand out to push him into eternity. A tremor passed through me and my ears began to ring and then, instead of pushing Costa over the rock I dragged him with me to the center of the rock.

I threw the dagger from me and rushed down the path as though I was running away from a pursuing enemy. After I had washed my face I waited for Ileana to come down. I would forgive Costa when I quieted down, I reasoned. He owes me his life. He will never feel any ill-will toward me. And Ileana! She has seen how I had him at my mercy. That was enough. But she did not come down. I waited and waited and waited. A sudden fear seized me. Had he murdered her, or what?

I climed up again to the top. Ileana was holding Costa in her arms.

"Ileana!" I screamed.

"Coward," she answered. "Coward, coward. Coward, *scribbar*, coward, scribbler, coward!"

"SO YOU have come back! I am happy, son," Murdo greeted me when I had climbed near him on the first wagon of the caravan waiting for the outcome. But where is Ileana?"

"She is with him. I could not do it, Murdo. I could not do it. I had him at my mercy! But I could not do it. I could not push him over into the dark water—I—I—could not."

"What?" Murdo yelled. "And I trusted you, had faith in you! You could not? You could not? Coward, coward, coward! You were afraid to take life. Coward, coward!"

And that very night I started on my way home followed by a mocking multitude of Gipsy folk yelling after me:

"*Scribbar, scribbar*, woman in man's clothing. Coward!"

And it seemed to me that Ileana's voice was the loudest and the most jeering of all the voices that pursued me that night.

THE ELECTRIC HORSE

by CROSBIE GARSTIN

WE, THE "2-Bar" outfit, sat in a row, our backs to the bunk-house, smoking after-supper cigarets and watching the lightning at play along the Coyote Range.

A sag-bellied bank of cloud, miles long and blue-black, drooped over the sunset and danced upon the hills with spidery, electric legs.

"Guess some of them nesters up in the Coyotes 'll have their crops stamped out," the Kid commented.

Van Doorn, the roper, spat accurately between his feet.

"I should worry. What the —— do we care for farmers, anyhow? Let her rip; let her ramble I say; let her split wide open s'long as she lays some of this dog-gone heat."

"D'you get that, boys?" Long John, the foreman, inquired, whittling a plug of T and B into his palm. "None of you ain't to interefere with the lightning for Van's sake. He likes it."

"More'n I do, then," grumbled young Bercini, cuddling a snapping cattle-pup in his arms.

"Ever done any night-herding in a storm like this and have the bunch get a run on with you in front? I have. There was four of us and three fell and got trod out like red jelly. Now lightning scares me stiff I don't mind telling you. When it's around I wanna burrow like a prairie-dog."

"Better get down the potato cellar and sit there with a Bible balanced on your head like an old woman I uster know," drawled Van Doorn. "Swore the lightning daresent strike her through it."

"Never seen the Bible used thataway," said Long John, "but I've seen 'em lie on the floor with a stack of mattresses on top. Swore the lightning would never think of looking for 'em there, an' if it did the mattresses would take the sting out of the strike."

"Would they?" the Kid inquired, innocently.

"Sure," said Long John; "lightning will bounce off a mattress. You try it. But mind you the mattress must be good and springy."

"I done heard somewheres that rubber was good thing against 'lectricity," said the Kid.

Long John nodded.

"Then you done heard correct, son; it's a sure cure. If you should get stroked by lightning any time dissolve one automobile tire in a gallon of hot water and then gargle it. You'll be as good as new."

The Kid growled angrily:

"Aw cut out the bull, Long! I ain't so green as all that. What I mean is that 'lectricity won't touch you through rubber."

"It won't," said a new voice decisively.

We all turned. It was the stranger who had spoken. He had come loping into the yard ten minutes before supper and was now lounging replete against the wall, his hat-brim almost resting on his nose, a limp cigaret drooping from his clean-shaven mouth. Other than that he enjoyed an extremely healthy appetite and rode a mare with the "gridiron" brand we knew nothing about him. Except to pitchfork our victuals into it he had not previously opened his mouth.

"It won't," he repeated firmly. "Chief Injun Rubber certainly has wild-man electricity beat to a fade-away. With a pair of gum-shoes on you could kick a thundercloud from here to Christmas Eve and never start a corn. If you had a pair of rubber gloves you could grab a flash of lightning by the tail and snap it off.

"In the islands of Humtiddlyhiti where the rubber-plants sprout in great confusion they have what the dome-brows call "circular lightning." It starts straight but gets doubled up agin the rubber-trees and runs back again, and so round and round. A fire-insurance agent in them topical isles can't keep himself in toothpicks. I know because I've done tried it. Have I said enough to convince you all of the marvealious properties of rubber? I guess I sure have. Well, then, was any of you fellers ever in Pecos County, Arizona?"

Van Doorn nodded.

"I was—born there."

"Was any of you ever in Sand Hills, Wyoming?"

"Me," said Long John. "Married there—two or three times, I misremember which. Did you ever meet my second there by any chance? A Sioux squaw by the name of Bluebell."

"Sure," said the stranger without turning a hair. "Knew her well and she ain't repining you any, pardner; she's bettered herself, she says. She's married to a greaser now with one eye and no morals, who steals horses when he ain't in the calaboose for murder."

"Which is where you met him, I suppose?" said Long John.

The stranger nodded. "Correct. I was acting prison chaplain at the time, doping out up-lift to the stripey denizens. But, say, was any of you ever in Pine Forks, New Mex.?"

"Nope," said Long John. "None of us. You've done touched our one weak spot. You're safe to pitch us any yarn you like about that 'yer place. Has the dawgs got two tails there? And does the cows graze backward to keep the sand outer their eyes? Proceed Brother Ananias, proceed."

"WE WAS propounding lightning in all its branches before you horned in with you bigamistical remembrances, Brother Brigham Young," the stranger observed coolly. "Well, this 'yer Pine Forks is the son of a gun of a country for lightning. They have atmospherical bust-ups down thataway which make these northern flimflams look like a five-cent squib.

"Now there was an old feller domiciling them parts by the name of Obediah Ephraim Tennessee Jones. His face was like a cokernut husk for hair, he wore overalls Sundays and week days and a fur cap Winter and Summer. He bached in a little dobe in the Sierra Guadalupe foot-hills with a patch of corn on one side, a patch of pumpkins on t'other side and a patch of cactus back and front.

"The kind-hearted cattle-men uster let him run a few sheep on any bit of public range their steers wouldn't look at, and he had one old sorrel mare which same was the apple of his eye and her name was Marigold. At the time I'm telling of, howsomever, the mare was not as springy as she had been twenty-nine years before. Whenever she moved she creaked that loud that she set the whole of Sanguijuela City's teeth on edge and strong men'd rush out of buildings, tears in their eyes, cans in their hands and beg old Obed to slip a drop of oil into her and stop the racket.

"By'mby, not content with having the finest collection of spavins, curbs, windgalls, capped-hocks, ring and side-bones in the district, the old plug feels she can't be happy till she's got corns as well. So she wishes 'em on herself and presently is trapesing around as tender on her toes as a N'Yark policeman in his sister's boots. This worried Obed all to a frazzle, and he's all over the country asking learned folk what he'd better do about it. One day he meets up with a horse-wrangler from a cattle outfit and he puts the puzzle to him.

"Get her shod," says the wrangler, "with rubber-pads in between her shoes and her hoofs. That'll protect her tender soles over the rough going.

"Obed thanks the guy, gets the job did rightaway and presently old Marigold is plunking her feet down as solid as if they was made of cast iron and New Mexico was built of butter. 'Bout this time, business being slack, the real-estate operators, mine-owners, bunco-steerers, missionaries and other leading industrials of Sanguijuela City thinks they'd love to attract a few Eastern capitalists into our fair country and separate 'em from their bank-rolls. They done talked the matter over with the help of gin-rikkies and shooting-irons and decided that nothing was so likely to put Pine Forks on the map as a country fair and a race meeting.

"They sat up all night for a week making out their publicity literachoor, had it printed by the ton and swamped the whole United States with it. In Pine Forks County all were busy preparing to give a right hearty Western welcome to our Eastern brothers. The bunco-steerers were weighing their roulette-wheels and marking their cards; the missionaries were out hiring thin Indians to beg for. The oil-bore and mine-owners were dolling up their claims with imported juice and ore. All the range boys was given six-shooters and shown which end the bullet came out. A Los Angeles movie-queen came down and taught all the ranch women to act like gen-u-ine "cow-girls." Believe me, fellers, when Pine Forks County starts to do anything—or anybody—it does it proper."

"We believe you," said Long John; "given that you're an average sample citizen of this 'yer Sandy-jeweller City we'll believe any blame thing you like to tell us about it."

THE stranger solemnly raised his hat.

"God bless you for them kind words, pardner. It ain't often one meets such trustful natures as yourn." He sighed deeply. "I only wish I had run across you ten years ago when I was peddling gold-bricks, Brazilian diamonds and oil-claims down in dear old Sanguijuela; you'd ha' been the makings o' me. Well, to continuate—the great day arrived and so did the folk; they came herdin' into town by train, aughty-mobyle, buggy, horse, foot and wheelbarrer. They came from all over the States includin' Alaska and not forgettin' Utah.

"Pine Forks County was there to a man, even down to Uncle José Glorioso Garañon who had been bed-ridden for twenty years but came along in an ox-wagon, bed and all.

"Old Obediah E. T. Jones was also present, dolled up in his pussy-cap and Summer suit o' dungarees and riding old Marigold who was cuttin' curves through the mesquite, like a haughty buck-rabbit, on her new gum-shoes.

"It was sure a sump'chous occasion. The saloons was balin' out the snake-juice by the bucket and takin' in the money in coal-shovels. The rubes was donatin' their hard-earned stakes to the tin-horn gamblers as fast as they could loosen 'em from their wads; the missionaries had garnered more subscriptions into the fold than they needed to retire on, and the mine-owners had sold their claims for ready money ten times over.

"The soda-fountains was founting continuous; the bowlin' alleys was rumblin' like thunder and the shootin'-galleries was shot fuller of holes'n a roll of chicken wire. 'Long 'bout noon folks reckoned it propitious to let loose the horse-racin', so all hands adjourned to the course, which was one of them circular, round affairs. The committee had put up a good lump of stake money and all kinds of professional speed-ponies and jockey-boys had assembled to cut it up.

"Just as the first race was startin' the sky goes as black as Jack Johnson and along ambles one of them 'yer hum-dinging, ding-busted, all-fired sons of guns of storms I done related to you concernin'. Gee it was some daisy! It whooped and banged and cracked and ripped like as if all the dead gunmen was riding the clouds and shootin' the place up. The starter saw the rain comin' and let the horses off so's he could duck in out of it, and away they went, lickety-split, with all ——'s fireworks blazin' behind 'em.

"Crash! went the thunder. Fizzle! went the lightning, and a stroke of it dived into the crowd and caught old Marigold slap between the ears. She ra-ared up once and let a screech like as if she was split in half; then she off down the course in leaps like an Austrian canned-garoo. Obed flat on her back, pullin' leather with hands, teeth and toe-nails.

"Pull he might, pull his darndest, but there weren't no stoppin' her—no siree! She caught the last race-horse, caught and passed it quicker'n scat. She caught the bunch of 'em and was through, knockin' 'em left, right and endways. She caught the leadin' horse and passed it 'sif it were gallopin' backwards.

"On she went, round and round the course, cracklin' like a flag in a gale, fizzlin' like a hot kettle; blue sparks streakin' from her mane and tail. She went so fast the wind tore the fur cap off Obed's head, it tore his hair off and his whiskers and his clothes. When he finished up he was as bald as an egg and as bare as a bull-frog. It were a tarnation fine race, the best I ever seen." He paused.

"So she won it?" I asked.

He snorted.

"Won it! I should guess. She not only won that race *but every other race that day!* She couldn't stop, she were bung-full of 'lectricity, don't you understand? She'd got a whole stroke of lightnin' bottled up inside her which couldn't get out nohow."

"Why not?" said the Kid.

" 'Cos of her rubber-pads, you mutt!" the stranger roared. "Ain't I done told you rubber is the sure dope to muzzle lightnin'?"

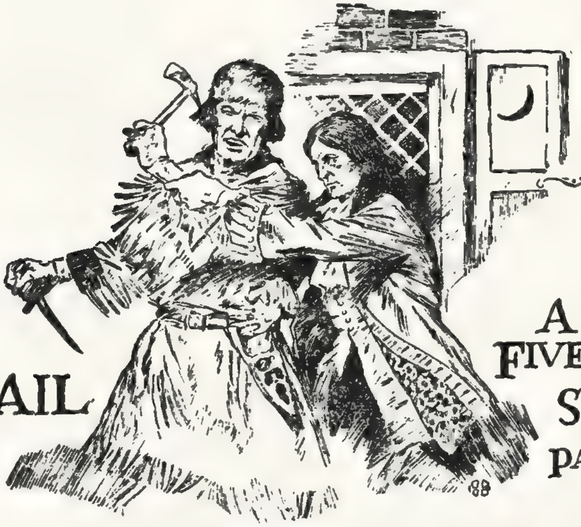
Van Doorn wagged his head.

"It must be mar-vealious stuff."

"It sure is," said the stranger, mollified. "It sure is, believe me."

Long John uncoiled his long length and stood up.

"We believe you, pardner, we believe every word you say. But listen; for six years I've defended the Heavyweight Lying Championship of this range against all comers, but now—well I guess I know when I'm beat. Boy, fetch this gen'leman the belt."



THE DOOM TRAIL

by ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH

A FIVE-PART STORY

PART II

Author of "Man to Man," "Claymore," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

IT WAS on the night of my return, incognito, from France as a refugee to London, that I inadvertently ran to the aid of a man who was beset by cutthroats. He turned out to be Master Juggins, an old friend of my family's, and in gratitude he gave me succor in his home. But I was outlawed everywhere, for I had first trafficked with the Jacobite supporters of James, the Pretender, and then quit them, having wearied of popish intrigues.

Master Juggins resolved to use me for my own good, and incidentally advance his fortunes also. He proposed sending me to the new continent of America in the interest of his trade and to assist in counteracting a plot by a certain Andrew Murray, influential in Government and trade circles. I accepted gladly; and so in disguise accompanied Juggins to a meeting of the Lords Commissioners.

It was here that I learned how the opposition stood. Accordingly Juggins secured passage for me on the first boat bound for the New World. I sailed the following Saturday, and discovered to my disgust that Murray, his daughter and his friend de Veulle, a traitor whom I had once humiliated at Paris, were fellow-passengers. Murray was guarded by a negro, and I was on the lookout for trouble.

De Veulle saw through the disguise I was wearing, and a quarrel started. Shortly afterward some one crept up behind and overpowered me. I struggled, but it was no use. I could not resist the snakelike arms which mastered me. One shifted swiftly to a grip on my legs. I was whirled into the air and dropped clear of the railing—falling—falling, until the cold waters engulfed me.

CHAPTER VII

A TRUCE

I CAME to the surface, fighting for breath, my hands battling fruitlessly at the slimy side of the ship, which slid past as relentlessly as the passage of time. I tried to cry out, but the salt water choked me. Not a sound came from the decks above. The blackness was absolute, except for the mild gleam of a watch-lanthorn on the poop.

Danger and the peril of death often have been my lot, but never in all my life—no, not even when the Keepers of the Trail had bound me to the torture-stake—have I experienced the abysmal fear which clutched my heart as I struggled to save myself from the chilling waters whose numbing embrace was throttling my vitality no less surely than the long arms which had cast me overboard.

Death was only a brace of minutes away—not death from drowning, but death from the bitter cold that paralyzed my limbs and smote my heart. In the mad desperation of my fear I heaved myself waist-high out of the water, hands clutching and clawing for the support which reason must have denied me to expect.

I was sinking beneath a smooth-running wave along the counter when my fingers came in contact with a dripping rope, which slipped through their grip and lashed me in the face. This time I did contrive to cry out, a brief, choked yell of exultation. My hands possessed themselves of it again, and I rove a loose knot in the end.

Had I dared, I would have rested myself in this loop before beginning to attempt the climbing of the mossy wall of the ship's side; but the coldness of the water forbade it. Only by the utmost power of will could I force myself to the necessary effort. A few moments' delay, and I should be incapable of action.

With teeth clinched I drew myself upward along the rope, thrusting forward with my feet for purchase against the side. Sometimes I slipped on the wet planks, and then I was put to it to hold my position. But after I withdrew my body from the water, what with the urgency of my effort and the stimulation of the exercise, some degree of my strength returned; and presently I was able to pull myself up the rope, hand over hand, until I reached a small projecting structure at the level of the deck to which was fastened the starboard rigging of the mainmast. How I blessed the untidy seamanship of Captain Abbot, which would have aroused the wrath of any true sailor, no doubt!

On this bit of a platform I rested myself, below the level of the bulwarks, one arm thrust round a tautened stay. And now for the first time I gave thought to my experience. I suppose that at the most not more than five minutes had elapsed since I had been heaved overboard, and obviously no one had witnessed the incident, for the deck was as quiet and deserted as it had been when I was attacked.

Who had done it? I accepted as a primary fact the impossibility that it could have been one of the crew. I had speaking acquaintance with only two of them, Captain Abbot, himself, and Master Ringham, the second mate, a tactiturn Devon man, whose conversation consisted of curses, grunts and monosyllables. Neither could have any grudge against me.

No, I must seek the assailant in the camp of my known enemies, and those immense, twining arms could belong only to the ape-like negro. With the realization, hot blood drummed in my ears. I scrambled over the bulwark in a flash, and crouched down upon the deck to survey the situation. It was one against three—no, four, I reflected bitterly; for I made no doubt the girl would array herself against me. I must have some weapon.

I looked around me, noting that the watch were all ensconced upon the forecastle or the poop. Then I remembered that ranged around the bottoms of the masts were long handbars of wood, iron-tipped, which were used in making fast the sail-ropes. I ran across to the mainmast and tore one from its slot.

Nobody had yet seen me in the pitch darkness, and I stole across the deck to the door which gave entrance to the poop, my water-soaked shoes quite soundless. The door was ajar, and I opened it very carefully, listening to the murmur of voices in the main cabin. There was no light in the passage which led to the main cabin from the foot of the shallow stairs that descended from the deck level; but the main cabin itself was brilliantly lighted by several lanthorns.

Murray and de Veulle were sitting on the bench which ran across the stern, the table in front of them littered with cards. Murray, a look of placid satisfaction on his face, was pouring rum into two glasses. De Veulle was laughing as if he had listened to the merriest tale in the world. So much I saw when the entrance into the main cabin was darkened by the body of the negro, Tom.

He saw me descending the stairs, and apparently took me to be one of the officers coming off watch. At any rate, he stepped back into the main cabin and stood there, waiting to give me room. The passage was not more than fifteen or sixteen feet long, and as I approached him I smelled again that rancid, musky odor—the body smell, as I afterward discovered, of the savage, black or red—which had overwhelmed my nostrils just before I was pitched over the side.

'Twas that decided me. I took a firm grip on my improvised club, and, stepping into the pool of light in the main cabin, swung square around, face to face with Tom. He threw up both hands and staggered back with a wild scream of terror, eyes popping from his ashen-gray face.

I gave him no time for recovery, but brought down the iron-tipped end of the handbar with all my force across his skull. The blow would have killed any save a black man. I meant it to kill him. As it was, he dropped like a slaughtered ox, and lay in a crumpled heap of tawdry finery on the floor.

DOORS banged in the passage, and I stepped to one side, setting my back to the bulkhead, the while I fastened my eyes upon the startled amazement with which Murray and de Veulle regarded me. 'Twas Murray recovered first.

"Zooks," he remarked, taking snuff with his usual precision. "It seems that Tom is growing in the way of making mistakes."

"Aye, and such mistakes are like to react upon others," I replied fiercely.

"If I were a refugee from justice, I should be careful how I threatened law-abiding subjects," he answered calmly. "Well, well, it seems we have more company."

I followed his glance to the passage, where stood the girl of the green cloak, whilst over her shoulder peered the square, puzzled features of my silent cabinmate, Master Ringham.

The girl said nothing, her eyes shifting gravely from one to the other of us. But Master Ringham's official status got the better of his distaste for words.

"What hath happened?" he asked. "Is the negro dead?"

"I think so," I said. "He——"

"Not he," corrected Murray cheerfully. "You know not Tom, good Master Ormerod. He hath a skull on him can only be opened with blasting-powder."

"It matters little," I returned. "The rascal attacked me above, Master Ringham. I pursued him down here. There is naught more to be said. I will settle with his master."

The second mate looked questioningly toward Murray. I hated to compromise so, but I had not missed the veiled threat he had addressed to me nor his use of the name Ormerod. Remember, I was still known to the crew as Juggins.

I was uncertain what attitude the captain might take if he was told that I was a political refugee. There might be a reward at stake—and sailors were human like other men. What was one man's life to them—and he a stranger—if so many hundred pounds would purchase it?

"Why, that is fairly spoken," rejoined Murray, somewhat to my surprize. "I know naught of the circumstances, Master Ringham, but perhaps I may settle with our friend here. As for the negro, I will attend to him."

"And the captain?" questioned the second mate uncertainly.

"Oh, I see no reason why we should bother Master Abbot at this juncture. There will be time enough if we fail to agree upon the issue."

"There must be no more violence," warned Ringham, his eyes on me, his words addressed to all of us.

"Violence!" rejoined Murray jovially. "Let us reject the idea altogether. Why should we disdain sweet reason's rule? Eh? Master Orm—er—Juggins?"

I bowed ironically.

"If there is any further disagreement Captain Abbot shall be called," I said to Ringham. "That I promise you."

Ringham nodded and clumped back to his bunk, doubtless relieved at not being required to surrender more of his time off-watch. But the girl stood her ground, her eyes accusing all of us.

"Well, Marjory," said Murray pleasantly, "and do you plan to join in our debate?"

That was the first time I heard her name, and—why, I can not say—I heard it without surprize, as if I had always known it to be hers. It suited her, as names sometimes express the character and appearance of their possessors.

"What hath happened?" she asked in the same words the second mate had used.

"You have heard," said Murray.

She shook her head.

"That is not all. This—" she hesitated —"gentleman's clothes are wet. Tom does not attack people without orders."

Murray shrugged his shoulders. De Veulle answered her, leaning across the table, his eyes burning with hatred for me.

"You know what this man hath done, *mademoiselle*," he cried. "You know his record in the past. You know that he comes with us to spy out our plans, to thwart, if may be, what we undertake to do. Is any fate too hard for him? Why should you concern yourself?"

His voice grew coaxing.

"'Tis no matter for ladies' soft hands to dabble in."

"Then there has been fighting?" she asked.

I could stand it no longer.

"Fighting?" I snapped. "Aye, if you call assassination fighting. An attack in the dark upon an unarmed man, throwing him overboard to drown as you might a blind puppy, never a chance for his life!"

"Yet you are here, sir?" she said quietly.

"'Tis only by the intervention of Providence that I was saved—or the untidiness of our captain, who left a rope trailing over the side."

I grew sarcastic.

"You were pleased to say today that it was proof of a God in heaven that I had suffered misfortune. Sure, will you deny that the same God hath protected me against your father's——"

"My father?" she repeated questioningly.

"Well, what is he?" I returned cuttingly. "Mayhap you have some pet name for a parent who practises assassination."

"You have no right to say that, sir," she said with spirit.

"No right? Did not you yourself say Tom never acted without orders?"

"But——"

"And furthermore, if this case is not enough, let me tell you that this man here—I pointed to Murray; for some reason I disliked to call him her father, even in wrath—"set a gang of ruffians to murder a friend of mine in London."

"Do you know that for a fact, sir?' she demanded with her unflinching gravity.

"I do."

MURRAY rose from his seat behind the table.

"Your proof, sir?" he asked coldly.

"Proof?" I answered weakly. "Why, I was there!"

"Aye, sir," he rejoined with dignity. "But your proof that I hired assassins?"

I was silent.

"As for Tom," he continued, "if he had drowned you I do not believe that I should have wept many tears. You are in my way, sir. But you have no reason to assume from my daughter's casual words that I was accomplice to his acts. Could you prove it before the captain or any court of law?"

I saw the twinkle in his eyes and knew that he was playing with me.

"No," said I shortly; "I could not prove it, even against him. I have no witnesses."

"And you could not even go into a court of law," he pursued, "for you are an outlaw, denied benefit of law or clergy."

"Yes," I flared in answer; "and you, sir, what think you might be your fate in New York if I denounced you to Governor Burnet for attempted murder? Would he make use of the opportunity—or no?"

The realization of this trump card I held had come to me in a flash of inspiration. Now it lay face up for all to see, and there could be no doubt it gave my enemies cause for uneasiness. Murray regarded me thoughtfully; a worried look replaced the cynical satisfaction with which de Veulle had watched my badgering; the bewilderment upon Marjory's face was deepened.

"I do not think I am so weakly situated as you had supposed," I mocked them. "Aye, you may denounce me to the captain for a Jacobite conspirator, and it may be he will see fit to believe you. You are three to my one. But when we reach New York, and I am brought before the officers of the Crown, I may have a different story to tell. Think you the governor would be loath to implicate a French officer and the man who is leading the fight against his struggle to control the fur-trade?"

Murray nodded his head slowly, and sank back in his seat.

"Sure, you are a lad after my own heart," he said. "That was well thought of. 'Tis checkmate—for this present."

"Nonsense," stormed de Veulle. "Why should we fear his trumpery tales? Who are we to be denounced by him?"

"Because I know somewhat of Governor Burnet," replied Murray good-humoredly. "Nay, *chevalier*, I dislike to yield my point as much as any man; but Master Ormerod hath stopped us. We must have a truce."

But he reckoned without Marjory. The lady of the green cloak stood forward in the center of the cabin, passionate indignation shaking her whole figure.

"Oh, why do you talk like this?" she exclaimed. "Are we criminals that we must bargain with a criminal? It is as if we were embarked upon an enterprise as vile as his life of spying and intrigue!"

I had not made any headway in regaining her good opinion 'twas evident, and that must be the excuse for my barbed retort.

"You show unwonted sensibility, my lady," I said. "Sure, no men with good consciences would stoop to bargain with such as I."

"I fear me, Marjory," said Murray gently "that you have no appreciation of the tangled path which must be trod by those who concern themselves with affairs of state. The good and the bad are strangely intermingled. Sometimes we must consort with those we despise in order to gain a good cause. Sometimes we must use tools which irk us to fashion a policy to a righteous end. Sometimes we must stoop to tricks and plays which soil and shame.

"It can not be otherwise. And after all, what does it matter that you and I have cause to regret, if we may see the attainment of our goal? Shall we regret the payment of a bitter price? 'Twould be parsimonious, I say. 'Tis not we who count, who are but pawns; but the cause we serve."

"I like it not," she flamed.

"Like it or not, 'tis inevitable."

He turned to me.

"It seems then, Master Ormerod, that we must proclaim a truce for the time being."

"It is your necessity," I told him flatly.

"And yours," he returned urbanely. "What guarantees shall we exchange?"

I thought.

"Why, we can neither afford to risk the denunciation of the other," I said at last. "You, because you know that the Provincial Government would seize any excuse to incommode you. I, because I know that the Provincial Government would find it difficult to protect me against your charge, even though it exploited mine."

"The advantage would seem to be on my side," he remarked tentatively.

I leaned across the table so that his eyes met mine fully.

"Not so much as you might think," I asserted. "Have I the look of one who would fail in a desperate venture?"

"No, no," he answered smilingly. "So be it, then. But the truce holds good only for the period of our voyage together?"

"That is understood," I agreed.

His eyes hardened.

"Did you ever hear of the Red Death and the Black Death, Master Ormerod?"

I shook my head, puzzled.

"You have met the Black Death. You have yet to meet the Red Death. And you may meet the Black Death again," he added as Tom groaned where he lay on the floor.

Marjory shuddered.

"Enough of this!" she exclaimed. "Is it understood there is to be no killing on this ship?"

"It is, my dear," Murray responded. "And now I think you had best withdraw. This has been a trying interview for you, I fear."

She looked from one to the other of us, as if half in doubt; and then gathered her cloak around her. We all three, as with one accord, bowed low as she stepped into the passage.

Murray opened a lanthorn and snuffed the candle within.

"You must be weary, Master Ormerod," he said solicitously. "It hath been a trying evening for you, too, I fear."

"Ah, the devil played a strong hand, Master Juggins," de Veulle chimed in, with a yawn. "You do not object to your old name, I hope? It fits you like a snug shirt."

"Not in the least," I retorted. "'Tis an honest name. You will note, I hope, that the devil, as always, was checkmated, even though he had two of the minor fiends of darkness at his elbow."

Murray laughed, the fine, resonant laugh of a well-bred, honorable gentleman.

"Zooks, *chevalier*, have done. The man hath a rare metal."

"If wit fails, try small-swords," I suggested as I left the cabin.

CHAPTER VIII

I HEAR FIRST OF THE DOOM TRAIL

ONE day followed another and one week ran into the next as the *New Venture* made her southing and bore west toward the New World. The weather was blustery and raw. Gales stormed down out of the polar regions and drenched us with snow. Head winds baffled us. Once a tall-masted stranger chased us for two days and a night before we lost her and might continue our course.

But we who shared the tiny quarters under the poop contrived to live together without further quarrels. It seemed almost as if the opposition of the elements had overwhelmed the bitterness of conflicting human interests.

The girl with the green cloak—I called her Marjory in my thoughts—ignored my existence. She spent much of her time with de Veulle, walking the deck with him, reading or playing at cards. I liked to think she did it to provoke me. Sometimes, too, she chatted with the seamen, and they taught her the trick of handling the wheel. But I did not speak to her after the night she came into the main cabin and found the negro, Tom, lying on the floor at my feet.

De Veulle gave me a wide berth. He did not like to be reminded before others of that duel in the Toison d'Or. Tom's eyes never left me if I was within the range of their vision; their blind, yellow glare haunted my dreams. He snarled sometimes like a caged wild beast when I walked near him. But he never lifted a finger against me.

With Murray my relations were outwardly friendly. He liked much to talk, and indeed he demonstrated a considerable acquaintance with the great men of his period. But he never dropped a hint concerning the enterprise in which he was now engaged. Nor for that matter did he ever seek to draw me out on the mission I served.

He was a man of extraordinary perspicacity. Once he had determined accurately the measure of an opponent he never made the mistake of underrating his enemy.

"Most of the failures in life come from overconfidence, Master Ormerod—" he called me by my real name with scrupulous courtesy when we were alone, and was equally scrupulous to dub me Juggins if Captain Abbot or one of the crew happened to be present—"as I dare swear you know. I have long made it a rule of my life never to believe that any other man could be less diligent about his affairs than I myself.

"If I find myself in opposition to a man—yourself, let us suppose—I do you the credit of granting you my own degree of intellect. So, I have learned, may one's interests be best safeguarded."

For the rest, he exhibited much concern in the personalities at Versailles and St. Germain, and aired his views regarding the existing state of the English nobility and Court with a vanity which would have savored of the popinjay had it not been for his undoubted earnestness and the strange spell which the man's personality wove about him. Most of all, however, he delighted to discuss his own genealogy and the history of the famous Scots families with whom he was connected. He could descant on such topics for an entire afternoon—and with an uncommon candor and entertaining flow of intellect.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of our intercourse was that we talked together, more or less, every day for nearly two months; and at the end of that time I had the material for delineating the character of a man of gentility and fine feeling in matters of honor, who possessed the friendship or intimacy of many famous personages in Europe and America.

I knew that he claimed to be a younger son of a good Scots house, fallen into decay by reason of the Jacobite wars. I knew that he played a good hand at piquet, and was entirely honorable in gambling. I knew he had a dainty taste in snuff, cravats and linen.

And I knew absolutely nothing else, gained from his own admissions and abservance of his habits. He was patronizingly cordial to Captain Abbot and the other officers of the ship; he controlled Tom as I should a dog; he treated Majory with consideration, even affection, although not as I should have expected him to treat a daughter; he observed toward de Veulle exactly the right mixture of the older man of the world and the boon comrade.

He never referred to the enmity between us or the bargain we had made until the day we sailed through the Narrows, the entrance to New York's inner harbor, and saw far in the distance, behind tree-covered islands in a long perspective of forest shore-lines, the miniature provincial capital huddled on the point of the big island which the Dutch named Manhattan, an occasional steeple pointing skyward above the two and three story houses and the frowning ramparts of Fort George.

"We part for a time, Master Ormerod," he said, coming upon me where I leaned on the railing in the waist of the ship, viewing this unknown land where I must retrieve my fallen fortunes. "Our truce expires when we disembark."

"That is true," I assented.

"There is somewhat I would venture to observe upon, if you will permit me," he continued detachedly.

I inclined my head, thinking mainly of the exquisite beauty of this woodland setting, with the early Spring foliage already turning green, and the wide spaces of emptiness so close to a principal center of civilization.

"You are a youth of boldness and courage. I do not seek to flatter you by saying so. You possess intelligence. You may go far in the provinces, always supposing you do not succeed in winning a pardon. I opine that a pardon might be won if you went about it in the right way. There are gentlemen at Whitehall, who——"

His hesitation was eloquent.

"And you would suggest?" I asked him, faintly amused as I perceived the drift of his intention.

"Think well before you commit yourself to this venture. Mark me, sir, it means little to me. You know nothing of what you embark upon. You can not hope to overcome me. Why, the governor of this province, with all the semi-regal powers at his command, has failed to balk me in my plans. My influence is no less in London. If you continue as you have begun you will end, I fear, in an early grave. I say it not as a threat. 'Tis merely a prediction."

"I fear me I should lose your good opinion did I take your advice," I replied.

He looked me straight in the eyes.

"You would," he said curtly, and he turned on his heel and left me.

* * *

THREE hours later we lay at anchor in the East River under the lee of Nutten Island, which some called the Governor's because it was part of his official estate. The extent of the shipping was surprizing considering the size of the town, and we were fortunate to secure small boats to ferry us ashore. They landed us at a wharf on a canal which ran up into the town along the middle of Broad Street. From here I had my baggage carried by a waterman to the George Tavern in Queen Street which he recommended as being favored by the gentry.

Murray's party I overheard giving directions for the conduct of their effects to Cawston's Tavern in Hanover Square, a comfortable open place which we traversed on our way to the George. The streets were all shaded by a variety of trees—locusts, beeches, elms—and in some parts and along certain blocks they were paved.

The houses, many of them, were stanchly built of brick and tiles, often of more than one color. Their gable ends fronted upon the streets. The more pretentious ones had gardens behind, and many had platforms on the roof whence the members of the family might secure a broad view of the town and bay.

Along the water-front there were frequent warehouses, and the chief impression that I gained was one of bustling wealth and prosperity. Indeed, although New York was then, and for many years afterward, inferior in population to Boston and Philadelphia, it vied with them in the volume of its trade.

After a meal which was as good as any I had ever eaten in Paris or London I inquired of Master Kurt van Dam, the proprietor of the George, where I might find Governor Burnet. Van Dam was a broad-bodied, square-headed Dutchman. He sat in the ordinary, smoking a long clay pipe, and if the waiter had not pointed him out to me I should not have been able to distinguish him from a dozen other natives of the town, precisely similar in build and each sprawled back upon a bench or chair, puffing at a pipe which reached from his lips to his knees.

"You vant to sbpeak to der gofernor, eh?" he said slowly. "Hah! Myndert!"

He recalled the waiter who had piloted me to his side.

"Haf you seen der gofernor dis morning?"

Myndert had not.

"Vell, it maype he is at der Fort," reflected Master van Dam.

"He vouldt pe, if he vas," said a stout burgher on the next bench. "Put he is not."

"You are sure?"

"*Ja.*"

A third stout Dutchman removed his pipe from his mouth and blew a mouthful of smoke toward the ceiling.

"Der gofernor is still at Cabptain van Horne's," he said, and immediately replaced the pipe in his mouth.

"To pe sure," assented van Dam. "Der gofernor is only a little time married to Captain van Horne's dotter. He lifs with dem vile der house in der Fort is mate bpretty for her."

"And where is Captain van Horne's house?" I asked.

"In der Broad-Vay not far oop from der Fort. You valk across through Hanofer Square."

I thanked him and walked forth.

In Hanover Square, which was only a few steps distant, there was a crowd collected about the entrance to Cawston's Tavern. Murray was standing in the doorway, Tom on one side of him, and a huge, red-haired giant in buckskin, with knife and tomahawk at his belt on the other. I stared at the red-haired man, for he was the first woodsman I had seen, observing with curiosity his shaggy locks and fur cap and the brutal ferocity of his face.

I stared so long that I attracted the attention of Murray, who broke off his conversation with the group surrounding him, and with a pale smile pointed me out to his buckskin retainer. The man scowled at me, and one hand went to his knife-hilt.

I spoke to the citizen nearest me.

"What is the occasion of the crowd?" I asked.

" 'Tis Master Murray, the fur-trader, hath returned from London after winning his case before the Lords of Trade," he answered.

"How is that?"

He regarded me suspiciously.

"Are you a stranger?"

"I am but just landed from the same ship as carried Master Murray," I assured him.

"Ah!"

His manner became impressive; plainly he considered himself one who imparts portentous news.

"Master Murray, as you will soon learn, sir, is our most enterprising merchant. He hath built up with much difficulty a valuable trade with the French, with the result that the business of the province hath doubled.

"But the governor will have none of it, or so he says. He hath done all that he may, even to passing laws against Master Murray's trade; but now, it seems, Master Murray hath carried his case to the Lords of Trade, who have refused to approve the laws."

I thanked the man and pushed on through the crowd. So that was the story Murray was telling! And plainly he had the prestige and the following to make himself a dangerous force, even, as he had boasted, against the governor and the provincial authorities.

But on the outskirts of the gathering I chanced to overhear another conversation which indicated that Murray's hold upon public opinion was perhaps not so strong as my first informant had led me to believe.

"He hath the devil's own luck," murmured a prosperous-appearing citizen.

"Aye," said his neighbor bitterly; "they will ply a grand traffic over the Doom Trail."

The odd name, so sinister in its implication, struck my imagination. I lingered behind the two, pretending to peer over their heads.

"And 'tis these fools here who will pay for it in the long run," answered the other.

"And yourself and I," rejoined the second.

As I turned to leave, I met again the threatening glance of the red-haired giant which sought me out across the crowd. I tapped the nearest of the pair of disgruntled citizens upon the shoulder.

"Pray, sir, who is the tall fellow in buckskin on the steps?"

The man edged away from me as suspiciously as the first one I had accosted.

"I am a stranger in your town," I added.

" 'Tis a frontiersman," he replied reluctantly; "one called 'Red Jack' Bolling."

"An ugly knave," I commented.

But the citizen and his friend only eyed me askance, and I walked on, reflecting on the current of intrigue which I had uncovered beneath the placid life of the little town within two hours of my landing.

AS I WAS walking through Bridge Street, with the leafing tree-boughs overhead and the walls of Fort George before me, when another and smaller crowd rounded the corner from the Broad-Way, a street which formed the principal thoroughfare of the town and took its name from the wide space between the house-walls.

In the lead came an Indian. He was the first of his race I chanced to see, and sure, 'tis strange that we were destined to be friends—aye, more than friends, brethren of the same Clan. He was a large man, six feet in his moccasins, and of about the same age as myself. He stalked along, arms swinging easily at his side, wholly impervious to the rabble of small boys who tagged behind, yelling and shrieking at him.

His handsome face, with its high-arched nose, was expressionless. His eyes stared straight in front of him. He wore the *ga-ka*, or breechcloth, and thigh-leggings of soft, tanned deerskin. A single eagle's-feather rose from the scalp-lock which hung from his shaven head.

He was naked from the waist up, and on his massive chest was painted in yellow and red pigments the head of a wolf. He wore no other paint, and he was weaponless, except for the tomahawk and knife which hung at his belt.

The children danced around him like so many little animals. They never touched him, but some of the more venturesome hurled pebbles from the walk at his brawny shoulders.

"Injun Jim came to town, with his breeches falling down," they chanted.

"Scalp-taker, scalp-taker," shrieked another.

"Big Injun drink much fire-water," howled a group.

"Injun dirt, Injun dirt, always 'feared that soap will hurt," proclaimed others.

I can not repeat all the catch-calls and rimes which they employed, some of them too disgusting for print. Sure, the gamins of Paris, with their natural ability at verbal filth, might have listened respectfully to these children of a far province, attempting to humiliate one of the race who had formerly been lords of the whole land.

I looked to see some citizen intervene, but several who sat on their doorsteps or lounged in front of shops, smoking the inevitable pipe, viewed the spectacle with indifference or open amusement. And the Indian stalked along, his dignity unruffled through it all.

My wrath boiled over, and I charged down upon the tormentors.

"Be off," I shouted. "Have you no proper play to occupy your time?"

They fled hilariously, pleased rather than outraged by the attack, after the perverse habit of children who prefer always to be noticed instead of ignored. The citizens who had witnessed the persecution of the Indian chuckled openly at the discomfiture of his assailants, and then returned to their pipes.

I was proceeding on my way when I was dumfounded by hearing the Indian address me.

"Hold, brother," he said in perfect English, but with a certain thick guttural accent. "Ta-wan-ne-ars would thank you."

"You speak English!" I exclaimed.

A light of amusement gleamed in his eyes, although his face remained expressionless as a mask.

"You do not think of the Indian as these ignorant little ones do?" he asked curiously.

"I—I know nothing of your people," I stammered. "I am but this day landed here."

"My brother is an Englishman?" he questioned, not idly but with the courteous interest of a gentleman.

"I am."

"Ta-wan-ne-ars thanks you, Englishman." He extended his hand.

"Your kindness was the greater because you obeyed it by instinct."

I regarded him with increasing amazement. Who was this savage who talked like a London courtier?

"I helped you," I said, "because you were a stranger in a strange city, and by the laws of hospitality your comfort should be assured."

"That is the law of the Indian, Englishman," he answered pleasantly; "but it is not the law of the white man."

"It is the law our religion teaches," I remonstrated, feeling that I must defend this indictment of my race.

"Your religion teaches it to you, and you try to apply it to yourselves," he objected. "But you do not even try to apply it to the Indian. The Indian is a savage. He is in the way of the white man. He must be pushed out."

I took his hand in mine.

"All white men do not feel so," I said.

"Not all," he assented. "But most."

"I go now," I continued, "to Governor Burnet. I shall ask him to make a law that Indians shall be as safe from mockery as from violence in New York."

His face lighted up.

"Governor Burnet is a good man. My brother will speak to friendly ears. He does not say '—— Injun' and 'dirty beast' because we live differently from him. He is a man."

"You called me brother," I said. "I have no friends in this land. May I call you brother?"

That wonderful expression of burning intelligence lighted his face again.

"My brother has befriended Ta-wan-ne-ars. Ta-wan-ne-ars is his friend and brother. Ta-wan-ne-ars will not forget."

He raised his right hand arm high in the gesture of greeting or farewell, and we separated.

CHAPTER IX

THE GOVERNOR IN COUNCIL

WHERE Garden Street* crosses the Broadway I met the town bellringer, brandishing his bell.

"'Tis Friday afternoon of the week," he bellowed, "and all householders shall take notice they must collect their refuse and offal and dump the same in the river or the swamps beyond the city limits. And they are to sweep the streets before their shops and dwellings and destroy or remove the sweepings after the same fashion. Proclaimed by order of the worshipful mayor and aldermen."

He was beginning his oration all over again, when I approached him with a request for the location of Captain van Horne's house.

"Do you but follow your nose straight before you," he directed me, "until you come to the red-brick mansion with the yellow-brick walk this side of the Green Lane.† That is his."

Except for the walk he had specified, the house the bellringer described had nothing about it to distinguish it from those adjacent, and I could not forbear a smile at thought of the different degrees of magnificence which were deemed necessary by the potentates of the Old World and the New.

The negro servant who answered my knock admitted that the governor was within.

"But Massa Burnet done hab de gen'lemen ob de Council wid him jus' now, sah," he added doubtfully.

"I am this minute landed with letters for the governor from London," I said.

"Oh, bery well, sah. Dat be a dif'runt matter. Yo' come dis way, please. Massa Burnet be plumb glad to see yo'. Dis way, please."

He ushered me into the wide hallway which ran from front to rear of the house, and knocked on the door of the first room on the right.

"Enter," roared a jovial bass voice.

The negro threw open a leaf of the door and stood aside.

"Dis gen'lemun done jus' lan' f'om London wif letters fo' yo' Ex'luncy," he announced.

I saw before me a group of eight men gathered around a dinner-table, which was spread with maps and papers in place of eatables. At the head sat the man of the bass voice, ruddy-faced, comfortable in girth, with the high forehead of the thinker and the square jaw of the man of action.

"I am Governor Burnet, sir," he said. "Who are you?"

"These letters will explain, your Excellency," I replied, not caring to reveal my identity before so many persons.

I tendered them to him.

"Hah, from Master Juggins!" he exclaimed with heightened interest. "You sailed on the *New Venture*?"

"Yes, your Excellency—with Master Murray."

"That is well. Be seated, sir; be seated," ordered the governor as he slit the packet.

I found a chair by the fireplace, and watched in silence whilst he read through the close-writ pages, with an occasional word or interjection to the others, who had risen from their places and were clustered about him. They were, as I afterward learned, the most prominent men of the governor's faction in the province, who strove to uphold his authority and aid him in his effort to clinch the control of the fur-trade in English hands—Abraham van Horne, the governor's father-in-law; James Alexander, Robert Walter, Rip van Dam, a cousin to my friend, the proprietor of the George; John Barberie, Francis Harrison and Cadwalader Colden, the surveyor-general, he who later writ "The History of the Five Indian Nations," and who made himself remarkably acquainted with the history of provincial relations with the savages.

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* Now Exchange Place † Now Maiden Lane

"So! Humph!"

The governor laid down the covering letter which accompanied the detailed report of the operations of Murray in London.

"You are Master——"

He examined the letter again.

"Humph! Yes."

His keen eyes deliberately scanned my face.

"I see. Better——"

He turned from me to his councilors.

"It is apparent from what Master Juggins has writ that Murray has triumphed, gentlemen, even if not so absolutely as he would have our citizens believe. However, we know the worst, and we may prepare for it. If I may have your indulgence, I would crave an adjournment of our meeting to enable me to discuss some aspects of the situation more intimately with Master Juggins' messenger."

There was a murmur of assent, followed by a scraping of chairs and fluttering of papers as the meeting broke up.

"One moment, your Excellency," I interposed. "I have also a letter from Master Juggins for the Honorable Cadwalader Colden of your Council—if he is here."

"Indeed, he is," assented the governor. "A moment, if you please, Colden."

A thin, bustling man, with very bright black eyes and a dark complexion, who had been sitting at the governor's right hand, detached himself from the exodus and resumed his chair. His nervous fingers quickly tore loose the envelope of the letter I handed him, and he began devouring its contents, regardless of the confusion around him.

"Until tomorrow, gentlemen!"

The governor bowed the Council out, and shut the door upon the last of them. He beckoned me forward.

"Sit here beside us, Master Ormerod—for so I see you are rightly named, although you traveled under Master Juggins' name. Master Juggins vouches for you. That is sufficient for me. What say you, Colden?"

"Quite sufficient," agreed the surveyor-general. "Do you wish me to remain, sir?"

"Certainly. Glad to have you. This is no matter to be manhandled by the whole Council; but zooks, a man must have advice now and then, whether he takes it or not! Now, Master Ormerod, do you tell us as fully as you may what you know of Murray.

"Begin at the beginning. Spare nothing. Tell us how you yourself came into this.

"Master Juggins hath slated you for a prominent part. I respect his judgment, but more than our immediate fortune hinges upon the issue of what we do, and I must know all."

The while he was talking he walked to the fireplace, selected a clay pipe, walked back to his chair, crammed the pipe with tobacco and cracked flint and steel to a slow-match of wadding, with which he lighted it. Colden sat low down in his chair, finger-tips joined, drinking in everything which was said. He was like a vigilant terrier in his watchful eagerness.

I RECOUNTED the circumstances of my meeting with Juggins, the hearing before the Lords of Trade and the incidents of the voyage, not forgetting Tom's assault upon me and the strange bargain I had made with Murray.

"Then are you safe from denunciation," broke in the governor. "We think little of Hanoverian or Jacobite in New York. Here, Master Ormerod, you will find only Englishmen laboring to wrest a living from the wilderness and to extend their country's power and richness. What you were matters little. 'Tis what you are we judge you by.

"The bargain was typical of Murray. He is no ordinary villain. Already he hath persuaded the discontented elements in the province that I would take the bread from their mouths by stopping his trade. But he knows well that I would leap upon the excuse to lay him by the heels, and he will see to it that no suspicion of your past escapes."

"He threatened me with the Red Death this morning," I said. "Can you tell me what he meant by it?"

The governor and Colden exchanged significant glances.

"Bolling hath been in the town this week past," remarked the latter.

"I saw him on my way here," I said. "Ah, then, 'tis——"

"'Tis a saying of the frontier," explained the governor. "They call this red-headed Bolling and Murray's negro, Tom, the Red and the Black Deaths, for Murray is charged with having used them to remove from his path those persons he considers dangerous or whom he honors with his dislike."

"In the crowd attending Murray I also heard talk of the Doom Trail," I continued.

Governor Burnet smiled grimly.

"That is the popular name for the route by which Murray smuggles his trade-goods to Canada."

"But why the name, your Excellency?"

"Because 'tis said to be the sealing of a man's doom if he seeks the trail or any information concerning it. Is not that the story, Colden?"

"'Tis a story which hath more than legend to substantiate it," agreed the surveyor-general.

"Has the traffic been suspended during Murray's absence?" I asked.

"No," replied the governor. "Bolling and Black Robe have kept it in motion."

"And who is Black Robe?"

The governor laughed outright.

"You are red-hot for dangerous information, Master Ormerod. Black Robe is the Indian's name for one Père Hyacinthe, a Jesuit missionary, who, according to some of the tales our agents bring, shares with Murray the credit for conception of the conspiracy we are debating.

"But where Murray plots for the overthrow of English rule in America in order to bring back the Jacobites and enrich himself, Black Robe's ambition is to establish France as the supreme temporal power in the world and to extend the influence of the Pope by making his religion universal on this continent as it is in South America."

"Sometimes I almost doubted the plot could be so formidable as Juggins claimed," I said; "but——"

"Master Ormerod," returned the governor earnestly, "it is the most formidable blow which ever was aimed at us. It is formidable because it is based on a clever idea, upon a sound conception of the economic situation, and because it is prepared in secret and those who should be alive to the alarms we have sounded not only refuse to heed us, but would stop our mouths, so that we may not any more annoy them.

"Today, thanks to the law I had passed, which the Lords of Trade have now suspended, trade-goods in Montreal cost twice what they do at Albany. And this, mind you, despite the secret trade which Murray plies. Without that aid the French would never be able to meet our competition."

"Where do Black Robe and Murray make their headquarters?" I inquired.

"Murray spends part of his time here in New York or in Albany, but most of the year he is absent. He says he is on trading-expeditions—and we may not disprove it. But we think he stays at a station which is said to form a depot for the stores smuggled over the Doom Trail. Black Robe is reported to have a chapel there."

"'Tis called La Vierge du Bois," added Colden.

"And where is it?"

"If I knew, I should order a levy of the militia and burn it down at risk of my head," retorted the governor.

"But you must have some idea where it is?" I pressed incredulously.

Governor Burnet put down his pipe and unrolled a large scroll map which lay amongst the papers on the table.

"You forget that you have left the Old World of limited spaces behind you," he replied. "This province over which I rule is greater than all Britain—how much greater not even our surveyor-general, who knows more than any other man, can say."

HE SPREAD the map before me, and I gazed with fascination at the courses of unknown rivers, chains of untraversed mountains, broad savannas the foot of the white man had seldom trod, lakes like seas and immense blank spaces without even a mark upon them to denote their character.

"This is New York, Master Ormerod. Our settlements are confined to the coast districts, the island of Nassau*—" he motioned toward the window— "and the valley of Hudson's River. We have barely begun the task of colonization. There is room here for every soul in England—and to spare."

With his pipe-stem he pointed to the upper left corner.

"All this country is virgin forest. On the north and northwest 'tis bounded by the inland sea which we call Lake Cadaraqui†; to the southeast stretch the Adirondack

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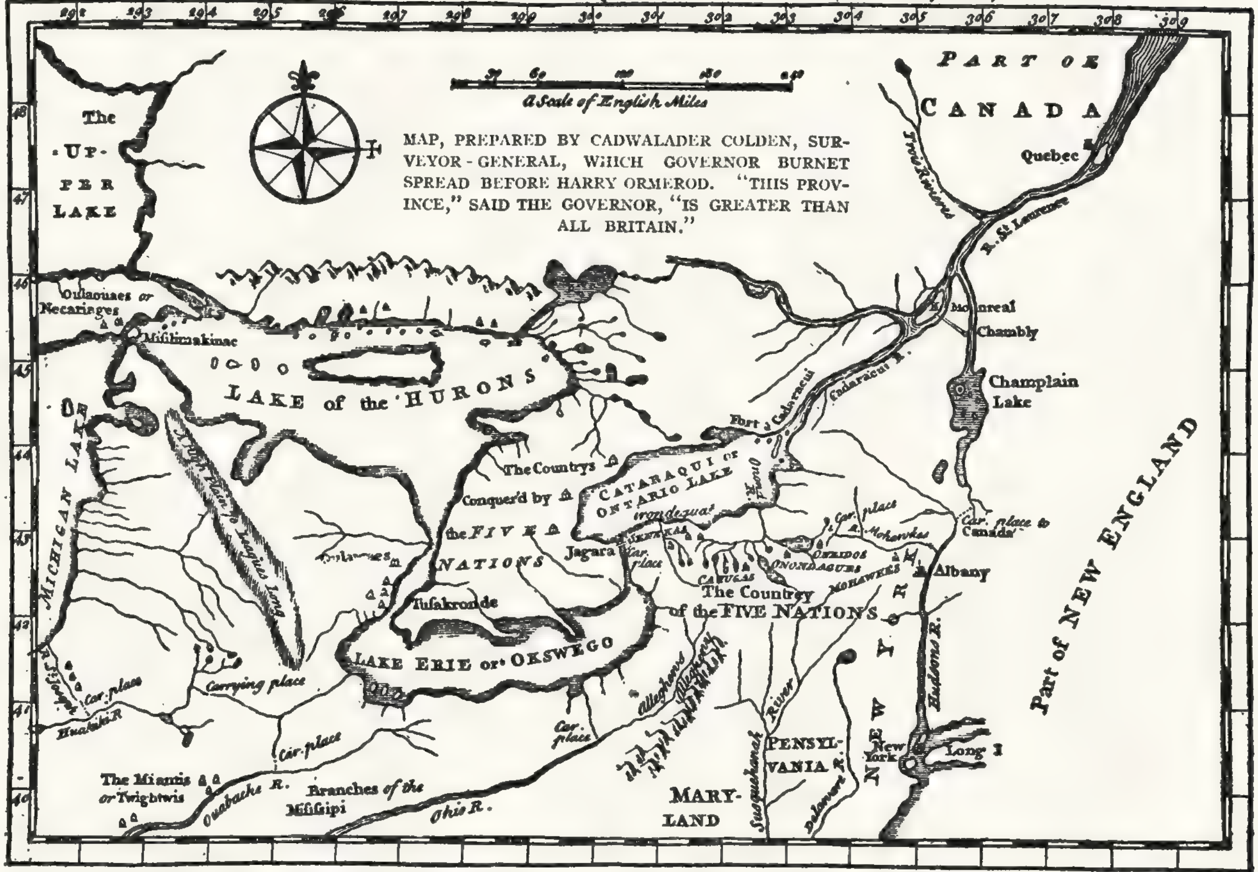
*Long Island †Lake Ontario

A MAP of the Country of the FIVE NATIONS, belonging to the Province of NEW YORK, and of the LAKES, near which the Nations of FAR INDIANS live, with part of CANADA.


A Scale of English Miles
PART OF CANADA
Quebec
Trois Rivieres
R. St. Laurence
Montreal
Chambly
Champlain Lake
Car. place to Canada
Part of NEW ENGLAND
Albany
Hudsons R.
NEW YORK
New York
Long I.
The Upper Lake
Outaouaes or Necariages
Misilimakinac
LAKE of the HURONS
MICHIGAN LAKE
A High Plain 70 leagues long
Fort Cadaracui
Cadaracui R.
CATARAQUI or ONTARIO LAKE
Onond. R.
Irondequat
Sennekas
Car. place
Cayugas
Onondagues
Oneidos
Mohawkes
The Country of the FIVE NATIONS
The Countrys Conquer'd by the FIVE NATIONS
Jagara
Tusakronde
LAKE ERIE or OKSWEGO
Alleghenney
Car. place
PENSYLVANIA
Susquehanah River
Delaware
MARYLAND
Ohio R.
Branches of the Misisipi
Ouabache R.
Car. place
Carrying place
The Miamis or Twightwis
Hualiki R.
R. St. Joseph
Car. place

MAP, PREPARED BY CADWALADER COLDEN, SURVEYOR-GENERAL, WHICH GOVERNOR BURNET SPREAD BEFORE HARRY ORMEROD. "THIS PROVINCE," SAID THE GOVERNOR, "IS GREATER THAN ALL BRITAIN."

N.B. The Tuscaroras are now reckon'd a sixth Nation, & live between the Onondagues & Oneidos; & the Nicariages of Misilimakinac were received to be the seventh Nation at Albany, May 30th 1723; at their own desire, 80 Men of that Nation being present besides Women & children. The chief Trade with the far Indians is at the Onondagues rivers mouth where they must all paſs to go towards Canada:

Mountains. Somewhere between those boundaries runs the Doom Trail. There are thousands of square miles of wilderness to search for it."

"And the Keepers of the Trail to guard its mystery," put in Colden.

"Who are they?" I questioned, as anxious as a small boy for further details.

"The *Ho-nun-ne-gwen-ne-yuh*" he repeated. "So far as we know, Master Ormerod—and we know only what our agents have been able to learn at second and third hand—they are bands of mercenaries, Canuagas, Adirondacks and Shawendadies, all renegades of the Iroquois, who are retained by Murray to protect the Trail.

"They roam that belt of forest you saw depicted on the map, and 'tis death for them to find any man, white or red, within it, save he bears Murray's sign manual. The Indians are a superstitious people, and they have come to believe that there is some supernatural agency behind the Keepers of the Trail. In plain English, they fear the Trail is haunted."

"By what?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"You would have to make a more profound study of their folk-lore than I have been able to in order to comprehend the precise gist of their belief. But they tell us that the False Faces, a race of demons from the underworld, to whom Murray has sold his soul, have rallied to his aid."

"Ridiculous!" I exclaimed.

"No doubt," assented the surveyor-general; "but the superstition is a factor in the problem."

"At every turn we run against the shrewdness and wit of this fellow Murray," exploded the governor. " 'Tis at once a tribute to his ability, and perhaps an index to our inferiority, that we have never been able to secure certain information of his operations."

" 'Tis evident, your Excellency," I ventured, "that the Lords of Trade will accept only positive evidence that he hath evaded the law."

"That means legal proof of smuggling," reflected the governor.

"And now that the Lords of Trade have suspended our law, his operations are no longer illegal, strictly speaking," said Colden. "But I make no doubt he will continue to handle the bulk of his goods over the Doom Trail, for he will not care to have his dupes in the province realize the enormous tribute they pay to France through him."

"The suspension of the law may well be permanent," I suggested. " 'Twas Master Juggins' conviction that Murray would scatter bribes right and left, at home and in London, to win his point. And he hath the French Treasury to draw upon."

Governor Burnet brought his fist down upon the table with a thud.

"Gadslife!" he swore. "There is naught for it but war! We must be after the dog! We must run him down! He hath Government at his orders. If he continues much longer as he doth today he may secure a petition to his majesty for my recall."

He sank back in his chair and stared reflectively at the map which was still spread out between us.

"It shall be done, gentlemen," he said more quietly after an interval of several minutes. "But we must move unofficially. What say you, Colden?"

"We can do nothing with official support," rejoined the surveyor-general, "and 'tis probable we shall receive the instructions of the Lords of Trade to suspend the law by the next Bristol packet."

"There can be no question of that," agreed the governor. "Well, the law shall be suspended. I will have the suspension publicly proclaimed. We must affect to mourn deeply over it. Aye, that is the course to pursue. Murray will grow bolder with his success, and we must put him off his guard."

He turned the pages of Juggins' letter.

"Then under cover we must concert the measures to be taken. That will be for Master Ormerod. Do you still crave the opportunity, knowing now the full measure of its perils, sir?"

"I am more anxious, if possible, sir," I answered. "Master Juggins was good enough to think I had the qualities for the venture. As you will have read, I have spent some years at Versailles and St. Germain. I speak French sufficiently well to pass on the frontier for a Frenchman. As for danger—why, your Excellency, the man who has ruined his life can have no fear for it. He has all to gain and nothing to lose."

"True," assented the governor. "But you know nothing of woodcraft or the life amongst the savages."

"Master Juggins gave me a letter to one Peter Corlaer, a ——"

Colden sat suddenly erect.

"Corlaer is now in the kitchen!" he exclaimed.

He turned to the governor.

"Peter came this morning with the Seneca chief, if your Excellency will remember."

"So he did. We will have him in."

Colden went out, and returned at once with two companions. One I recognized, to my amazement, as the Indian I had befriended an hour or two earlier. He greeted me with a faint smile. To the governor he rendered the splendid arm-high salute, and his deep voice boomed out—

"*Qua, Ga-en-gwa-ra-go!*" *

The other man was more like a tavern-keeper than a woodsman. Of a naturally large stature, he looked even larger than he was by reason of the fleshiness of his hogshead of a body.

At first glance he seemed all paunch, but when you studied him closely you saw that his fat was firm and hard and formed a sheathing for the most powerful set of muscles any man ever had. His face was tremendous, with little, insignificant features; but his eyes, behind the rolls of fat which almost masked them, twinkled with constant interest and animation, belying the air of stolid stupidity he affected.

"This is Corlaer, Master Ormerod," said the governor. "And with him is come a friend of ours, one of the two war-chiefs of the Six Nations. Peter, Master Ormerod hath a letter for you from Master Juggins in London."

"*Ja,*" he said vacantly.

I handed him the letter. He turned it over and over in his hand and picked at the seal. Then he handed it to the Indian.

"You read idt," he said.

CHAPTER X

THE RED DEATH

I LOOKED from one to the other with astonishment; but 'twas the governor who intervened.

"Your pardon, Peter," he said good-humoredly enough, "but that letter happens to deal with a most confidential subject."

"Oh, *ja,*" said Corlaer indifferently. "But I do not readt."

"Take the letter, Ga-en-gwa-ra-go," said the Indian. "Ta-wan-ne-ars does not seek your secrets. But you need have no fears. This young Englishman is Ta-wan-ne-ars' friend."

"How? What is that?" exclaimed the governor, much perplexed. "You know Master Ormerod?"

"Ta-wan-ne-ars knows not the Englishman's name," replied the Indian with his grave smile; "but he knows the Englishman's heart."

And in his sonorous English, with a slightly guttural intonation, he recounted how I had rescued him from his childish persecutors.

The incident recalled my promise, and I broke in impetuously upon his closing words.

"Aye, your Excellency, but he hath forgotten to add that I pledged myself to beseech you to make it illegal to mock at Indians in the city streets."

"An excellent thought," approved Colden. "We have trouble enough winning the friendship of the tribes without subjecting the visiting chiefs to humiliation in our midst."

"It shall be done at once," declared the governor.

He drew forward a fresh sheet of paper and hurriedly scrawled upon it the necessary instructions, then rang a bell and to the negro who answered said:

"Zach, do you carry this at once to Rollins the Bellman and bid him proclaim it through the streets at dusk upon his lights-round, and also at every general proclamation."

He returned his attention to the Indian.

"Ta-wan-ne-ars," he continued, "I need your friendship. I need the friendship of every one of your people for our King."

"Why," interposed the Indian, "has Go-weh-go-wa * become involved in war with some other king?"

"Not in a war with knife and tomahawk," answered the governor, "but in a secret struggle, wherein some of his own subjects are endeavoring to stab him in the back."

The Seneca drew himself erect.

"Ta-wan-ne-ars is your friend, Ga-en-gwa-ra-go. He is not the friend of Onontio† who rules at Quebec. Most of the white people are not well-wishers to the Indian, but you are of those we count our friends. I am come here with Corlaer to prove my friendship."

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* "Hail, Great Swift Arrow"—the Indians' name for the Governor of New York, whoever he might be.

* Literally, the Great Crown—Indian name for British ruler.

† The French Governor-General of Canada, regardless of identity.

"How is that?" asked the governor with interest.

Colden and I leaned forward. Corlaer stood by the table in precisely the same position he had assumed when he gave the letter to the Indian. He had not moved a muscle. In his face only his little eyes, behind their ramparts of flesh, stirred with the animation of life.

"On the frontier 'tis said that Joncaire, the Frenchman who governs the trading-post by the Falls of Jagara,* is about to begin the building of a stone fort."

"A fort!" protested the governor. "Sure, 'tis impossible! 'Twould be a direct violation of the Peace of Utrecht."

"Why, we are still in negotiation with Paris over Joncaire's defiance of the treaty in establishing a trading-post upon ground allotted to us," cried Colden.

"Idt is true," spoke up Corlaer.

His voice was high and squeaky, and sounded ridiculous coming from such a giant.

"Hath the building begun?" demanded the governor.

"I think nodt. Ta-wan-ne-ars broughdt me der wordt at Onondaga. We comedt to you as fast as we couldt."

"Ta-wan-ne-ars came because it was partly the fault of his people that the French are settled by Jagara," said the Indian.

"Yes," replied the governor. "Onontio and Joncaire first made the Oneidas drunk, and then bargained with them to sell the Senecas' land."

"They had no right to do so," assented Ta-wan-ne-ars somberly. "But now will you believe that Ta-wan-ne-ars is your friend?"

"I believe," said the governor. "But I pray you tell me why you feel for us this friendship? When I came to New York to govern the province my predecessor told me that the experiment of having you educated by the missionaries had failed, that you had returned to the forest, closer wedded than ever to Indian ways."

The Indian's face lighted up again with that grave smile which showed itself with scarcely a contraction of the muscles.

"Yes, Ga-en-gwa-ra-go, it failed to win Ta-wan-ne-ars from the ways of his people. Those ways are best for the Indian. You can not take a people like mine, who have lived in the wilderness as long as they can remember, and remake them in a few years so that they can live like white men.

"Once, your histories say, your people lived like mine. Well, I think it will take as long to bring the red man to your present ways as it has taken yourselves to reach them.

"But Ta-wan-ne-ars learned that of the two white races the English were the kindest to the Ho-de-no-sau-nee.* The French always have persecuted us. They try by most subtle means to convert us to their religion, which is not any better than our own religion. The English come to us bluntly and say, 'Be Christians,' and if we do not wish to be they let us alone.

"The French always have fought with us. The English have aided us. The French pay little for our furs; the English pay much.

"Ga-en-gwa-ra-go, I think the white man can never be an honest friend to the Indian, for he wants what the Indian has; but Ta-wan-ne-ars prefers the Englishman to the Frenchman, whatever may be the issue.

"*Ya ho!*"†

I CAN give no adequate conception of the impressiveness with which this speech was delivered by a savage speaking in a tongue strange to him. Every word rang in my ears.

"Who is this man?" I whispered to Colden as he finished.

"He is one of the two war-chiefs of the Iroquois League, both of whom are Senecas. His name, which signifies 'Needle-Breaker,' is actually a form of title which goes with the office. Moreover, he is nephew to the Roy-an-eh Do-ne-ho-ga-weh, who is Guardian of the Western Door of the Long House."

"He is what is called a sachem?" I asked curiously.

"There is no such title in use amongst the People of the Long House," replied the learned surveyor-general. " 'Tis an Algonquin word, I believe. The Iroquois equivalent is *roy-an-eh*, the title I gave to the uncle of Ta-wan-ne-ars.

"But our friend here has no such rank. The *roy-an-ehs* are hereditary nobles, the title descending by the female line and generally from uncle to nephew. 'Tis quite possible, of course, that Ta-wan-ne-ars will succeed his uncle in due course. Indeed, the fact that he hath been named principal war-chief of the League, with the charge of guarding the Western Door, would almost indicate as much.

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* Niagara.

* The People of the Long House, Indian name for Iroquois.

† "I have finished."

"He was taken as a youth and given to the missionaries—with the result that you see."

He broke off, for the governor was addressing me.

"Have you any objection, Master Ormerod, to my acquainting the chief and Corlaer with what we have been discussing?"

I shook my head.

"Very well."

He turned to the Indian.

"The letter which you hold in your hand, Ta-wan-ne-ars, is from Master Robert Juggins, of London, who was some time in the province when you were a lad."

"I remember Master Juggins," interrupted Ta-wan-ne-ars. "He sent me my first musket. Is this Englishman his friend?"

"Yes," said the governor. "He comes direct from Master Juggins, recommended to me for use in the plight I find myself in."

"I will help the Englishman," agreed Ta-wan-ne-ars eagerly.

He smiled at me.

"This Englishman is honest. He is kind. If he fights, I will aid him."

"Do you see?" whispered Colden in my ear. "You have saved an Indian from ridicule. In his estimation that is a greater service than rescue from the stake."

"But you know nothing of the cause I am enlisting you in," protested the governor.

"That matters little," said Ta-wan-ne-ars composedly. "If you and this Englishman and Colden are in it, it is an honest cause. What say you, Corlaer?"

"It vill pe goodt enough for me," declared the Dutchman solemnly.

The Governor laughed.

"My friends and I do thank you for the compliment you do us, Ta-wan-ne-ars. But I must lay our case before you, for we seek your counsel. Do you know that Andrew Murray is landed today and that he hath secured the consent of the Lords of Trade in London to the suspension of our law against the exporting of trade-goods to Canada?"

Both the Indian and Corlaer were startled from their customary stoical attitudes.

"Yes," continued the governor, "Murray landed this morning, together with a French officer, the Chevalier de Veulle, who——"

He stopped at sight of the passion in the Seneca's face. But 'twas Corlaer who spoke first.

"That is fery stranche news, gofenor, for on der frontier there is talk that an enfoy is coming to deliver a message to der tribes at Jagara from der King of France. Joncaire is calling a grandt council to meetd in der Summer. All der Indians from beyondt der Lakes and der West vill come."

"Strange news!" repeated the governor. "You may well say so! Murray overrides our law; Joincaire sets out to build a stone fort upon our soil at Jagara; the French King sends an officer, experienced on the frontier, with a special message for a grand council of the tribes.

"All three events come simultaneously. 'Tis impossible that accident so disposed them. Here we have the first indication of the culmination of the plot. Aye, 'tis graver even than I had supposed."

Ta-wan-ne-ars laid down the unopened letter from Juggins upon the table.

"Let some other read this," he said. "But it serves no purpose. This Englishman and Ta-wan-ne-ars are brothers. Corlaer, too, will take the Englishman into his friendship—not because he carried this writing across the sea, but because he is a man to be trusted. So much is to be read in his face. And now, Ga-en-gwa-ra-go, I would ask that Ta-wan-ne-ars may retire. What you have told me has clouded my heart with hatred, and I may not think straight."

His right arm swept up in the gesture of farewell, and the door closed upon his bronzed back.

* * *

"WHAT hath happened to irk him so?" inquired the governor in surprize.

"Idt was this de Veulle who ran away with der dotter of his uncle, Do-ne-ho-ga-weh," replied Corlaer, stirred again from his habitual silence.

"I remember," interposed Colden. "'Twas some four years ago. I remember having seen the maid at a council at Albany. She was called Ga-ha-no,* a pretty child and wondrous dainty for an Indian."

Corlaer seemed to ponder momentarily.

"I haf been many years with der Indians, gofenor; but nefer didt I see redt people lofe as we do. They know not what passion is. But Ta-wan-ne-ars was different. If he learnedt nothing else from der missionaries he learnedt to lofe der white man's way."

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* Hanging Flower.

"'Tis a sad story," commented the governor. "Is it certain de Veulle took her?"

"He didt not take her. She ran away with him."

"The chief will not attempt to take revenge here?"

Corlaer smiled.

"He will wait many years, if he must, to refenge himself in his own way."

"I wonder what became of her," I said. "'Tis only some three years since de Veulle appeared in Paris."

Corlaer shrugged his shoulders.

"Suppose you findt der Doom Trail andt come to La Vierge du Bois. Maybe then you know."

"That is exactly what we wish to do, Corlaer!" exclaimed the governor.

"You don't want much, gofernor," replied the big man dryly.

"Do you think it can not be done?"

Corlaer reflected, ponderous as a sleepy moose.

"Idt has not been done."

"Does that necessarily mean it never will be done?"

"No, but——"

"But what?"

"It will take much time andt money—andt then all depends upon der Indians."

"What Indians?"

The governor was extremely patient with the mental processes of the frontiersman.

"Der Six Nations."

"Why do you specify them?"

Again Corlaer was buried in thought. And I saw that his eyes, which ordinarily twinkled, now smoldered with a slow-burning fire.

"If we findt der Trail, gofernor, what then? We haf der Keepers. They are a strong bandt. We must fight them. You can not sendt soldiers. That wouldt be war. We must fight them with Indians. Andt what Indians couldt you get but der Iroquois?"

"Can we get the Iroquois?"

"I do not know," confessed Corlaer. "But if you get them, you smash der Trail."

"I see," said the Governor. "Yes, there is every reason why the Iroquois should join us. Look you, Corlaer, this is the obvious plan of the French. With Murray's aid they will cram their magazines with trade goods this Summer. They will make an impressive showing for the tribes that attend Joncaire's council. They will push ahead the building of the fort at Jagara. Once that is finished, they will have a curb on the necks of the Iroquois. They will be able to hold up the fleets of fur canoes from the Upper Lakes that now pass down to our post at Oswego on the Onondaga's River. In two seasons they will have wrested the trade entirely from our hands, and then if they are ready they can strike with musket and scalping-knife.

"And who, think you, will bear the brunt of the first blow? Who but the Iroquois, whom the French have dreaded since Champlain's day?"

"True, only too true," murmured Colden.

"Yes," assented Corlaer; "you haf der right of it, gofernor. What is your plan?"

"I shall send this young man—" he laid his hand on my arm—"with you and Ta-wan-ne-ars to spy out the ground at Jagara, to search the wilderness for signs of the Trail, to work upon the Iroquois in our interest. Master Ormerod knows naught of forest warfare, but he hath had experience with the French and he knows de Veulle of old."

"When do we start?" replied Corlaer simply.

"So soon as may be. I must see Ta-wan-ne-ars again and concert certain matters with Master Ormerod. But within the week you must leave for Albany. You need spare no expense, Peter. My own funds are pledged to this, and Master Juggins, too, is offering his aid."

Corlaer deliberately donned his cap of fur.

"It will not be money, but friendtship andt hate will serfe your turn, gofernor," he said.

"You have not yet read the letter from Juggins," I reminded him as he walked toward the door.

"So I haf not," he admitted, and took the letter from me and slipped it inside his leather shirt.

"Will you have it read?" asked Colden.

"No, der young man is all right. Ta-wan-ne-ars has chudged him."

With that he was gone, and a sense of bewilderment stole over me. It seemed incredible that either of the two odd characters of the wilderness with whom I had talked could really have existed.

But Governor Burnet lost no time in doubts. He paced the room, rubbing his hands together with satisfaction.

"We have done well, Colden. We could not have done better. Master Ormerod, you were indeed fortunate in going to the help of the Seneca. You earned, not only his friendship, but that of Peter as well. No letter from Juggins could have served you so handily. Peter hath the mind of an Indian for all his white face, and he looks at things as they do. He likes you."

"I can scarce believe in my good fortune," I replied. " 'Tis a change for the better, and a marked one, believe me, your Excellency."

"You are to be congratulated," he returned heartily. "But I must ask you to excuse me. I have much work to do. Pray grant me the pleasure of your company for dinner tomorrow. Colden, will you show Master Ormerod out?"

IT WAS dusk in the streets, a soft purple dusk that became velvet darkness under the trees; and I felt in no humor to return to the drab company which the tavern offered. I was lifted out of myself by a mood of exaltation. After years which had been starred with humiliation, penury, discontent, I saw opening before me the golden path of adventure.

I drank in the tree smells and the odor of the ground underfoot, and longed for the great forests I had traced on the governor's map. And so I wandered at hazard until I found myself in an alley leading down to the waterfront—and heard of a sudden the thud of flying feet. I spun around in time to see a monstrous bulk come sailing through the air, knife and tomahawk whirling in either hand.

"I'll kill yer, varmint," howled an ugly voice. "I'll cut yer heart out and skin yer and take yer scalp!"

I dodged the knife and grappled the wrist which swung the tomahawk, twisting myself behind him so as to hinder his attack. But he was far stronger than I and slung me back in front of him as if I were a sack of chaffed wheat. I still clung to his tomahawk hand and contrived to knock up another blow of his knife, but he must have disemboweled me in the next vicious sweep of the blade.

"*Hah-yah-yah-eeee-eee-ee-e!*"

The ferocious yell made my blood run cold. It startled my assailant even more. His muscles slackened just long enough for me to leap clear of him.

"——!" he snarled.

He drew one arm back to hurl his knife at me, but something whirred past my shoulder and his head jerked violently to one side. There was a sharp clang, and he fled precipitately, shouting curses.

Against the near-by house-wall a small, bright object glimmered through the shadows, and I stooped to snatch it up—only to leap instantly erect as a voice spoke at my elbow.

"My brother was in danger," said the voice quietly. "Ta-wan-ne-ars saw the Red Death follow Ormerod from the Governor's House, so Ta-wan-ne-ars followed him."

The tall figure of the Seneca was scarcely discernible in the gloom.

"Was it Bolling?" I asked.

He raised the shining object from the ground. It was his tomahawk, and curled about the blade was a lock of greasy red hair. He pointed to it.

"That time Ta-wan-ne-ars missed," he said grimly. "Some day the light will be better—and Ta-wan-ne-ars will not miss."

"Although you missed, you saved my life," I answered warmly. " 'Tis an obligation I shall not forget."

He laid his fingers to his lips.

"Hark," he said.

I listened, and from the water-front came the thunderous voice of the bellman.

"Half-after-eight-o'clock, and a fine night with a southwest breeze. And all householders are cautioned they shall set out their lanthorns, and if any nightwalker shall injure the same he shall be fined twenty pounds for each offense and jailed in the Bridewell.

"And his Excellency the governor is pleased to proclaim that whereas divers persons have mocked, assailed or sought to humiliate Indian visitors to the city, the governor has made a rule that such persons, upon apprehension, shall be set in the stocks for twelve hours the first time and upon the second offense shall be publicly whipped at the cart's tail along the Broad-Way."

Ta-wan-ne-ars replaced his tomahawk in its sheath.

"There is no talk of obligations between brothers," he said. "Come, we will walk together to your tavern."

CHAPTER XI

TA-WAN-NE-ARS UNDERSTANDS

"NO, WE will go to Murray's tavern," I said. "I will ask him if he thinks he can commit assassination here in the town as he does in the forest."

"Good," rejoined Ta-wan-ne-ars impassively. "I will accompany my brother there."

I remembered that de Veulle lodged at Cawston's, and hesitated.

"Let my brother Ormerod be at ease," added the Indian. "Ta-wan-ne-ars has mastered his hatred."

"Very well," I replied. "I shall be glad of your company, but we must not be tempted to violence. There are reasons for my meekness."

"It would not be courteous for Ta-wan-ne-ars to slay his enemy in New York when he is the guest of Ga-en-gwa-ra-go," returned the Seneca as he walked lightly beside me.

"I, too, hate your enemy," I said.

He was silent for as much as ten paces.

"My brother means de Veulle?" he asked.

"Yes; I once crossed swords with him."

"And he lives! Did he wound my brother?"

I recounted briefly the circumstances of the duel at the Toison d'Or. He made no comment until I had finished.

"I am glad my brother spared him," he said then. "For Ta-wan-ne-ars has often prayed to Ha-wen-ne-yu, the Great Spirit, to give him the life of this man who lives as though he were one of the fiends of the Ga-go-sa.*

"It is a bond between us that we have the same enemy. We did not need such a bond, Ormerod, but it is a proof that we were meant to be brothers."

At the next corner we met the bellman, trotting heavily.

"A citizen tells me he hath heard a horrid screech," he panted. "Do you know aught——"

"Yes," I told him. "I was attacked by a desperado named Bolling——"

"God save us, I knew there would be mischief with that villain in our midst!" interrupted the bellman.

"There would have been sore mischief done had not this Indian, who is visiting the governor, come to my aid," I rejoined.

"Did you slay the man?" asked the bellman apprehensively.

"No; he fled."

"'Tis a savage rogue, and a deadly. Gadslife, my master, but you had a fortunate escape. I will run to the watch house and give an alarm. Aye, we should have a file of soldiers from the fort. This is no easy task that is set for us. I will——"

His threats and adjurations died away in the distance, as he hurried on, his regular duties forgotten.

"What think you hath become of Bolling?" I asked Ta-wan-ne-ars.

"He is beyond the city limits, brother. There are no palisades for him to pass, and flight will be easy. He must have had a swift horse in readiness, for he would have been obliged to flee equally had he slain you."

"Will they catch him?"

Ta-wan-ne-ars laughed briefly, a trick he had which I afterward discovered to be rare, although not unknown, amongst the Indians.

"Those who are charged with his pursuit? No, brother; as well might the beaver pursue the wild pigeon. He will be buried in the wilderness tomorrow. But some day Ta-wan-ne-ars will come up with him—or perhaps it may be you, Ormerod. That will be a bad day for the Red Death."

At Cawston's we looked in vain for Murray or any of his party in the taproom and ordinary, so without a word to the servants we ascended the stairs to the upper floor. In the hall I halted momentarily, considering which door to knock upon, when the puzzle was solved by the opening of the one by which we stood.

My Lady Green Cloak appeared, and she started back in amazement, tinged with fear, at sight of me and the stalwart, half-naked figure of the Seneca, arms folded across his painted chest, his eagle's-feather reaching almost to the ceiling.

I bowed to her.

"Good evening, Mistress Murray," I said. "I am come with my friend for a word with your father."

"He is engaged," she answered quickly.

"That may be, but I must speak with him on a matter of much importance."

"What is that, sir?"

She began to recover her self-possession.

"What interest have you in common?" she added.

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* False Faces.

"None, save it be to dislike the other," I replied. "But I am obliged to ask your father for the second time if he condones assassination in the dark."

Her eyes widened with horror, then darkened with stony anger.

"Sir, you are monstrous impertinent!" she exclaimed. "How dare you suggest such a thing?"

"Because it occurred a quarter-hour past."

"And because you are assailed by some foot-pad in a disreputable part of the town, is that a reason for you to charge Master Murray with assassination?" she demanded with high contempt.

"Oh, I have proof," I said airily.

But my anger grew with hers. It maddened me that this girl, who I knew was honest, should be arrayed against me, should hold for me the contempt of a clean woman for a man she deemed a traitor.

"Look you, Mistress Murray," I went on haughtily. "The watch are now searching for your father's emissary. The garrison are to be turned out. Any moment Master Murray is like to receive a summons to go before the governor. He has overplayed his hand this time. He——"

The door behind her opened again, and Murray himself come out.

"I thought I heard voices—

Ah, Master Juggins——"

"Ormerod," I interrupted suavely.

His eyebrows expressed polite astonishment.

"To be sure. Forgive my stupidity. It hath gone so far as that already, hath it?"

"It hath gone so far as attempted assassination—for the second time," I retorted.

"Assassination? Tut, tut," he rebuked me. "Master Ormerod, you use strong language. And who in this little town of ours would seek to murder a gentleman new-landed like yourself?"

TA-WAN-NE-ARS stepped to the front.

"Does Murray know this scalp?"

He permitted an end of the lock of Bolling's hair to show through his clinched fingers.

Marjory shrank back in terror. Murray's face became convulsed with passion.

" 'Sdeath!" he swore. "If Bolling is dead by this savage's hand I shall know the wherefore of it! What? Do the Iroquois take scalps within the city?"

Ta-wan-ne-ars laughed, and slowly opened his fist to reveal the single lock of hair.

"Ta-wan-ne-ars only takes the scalps of honorable warriors," he said in his smooth, low-pitched voice. "But the Red Death escaped tonight by the width of these hairs. Does Murray think Ga-en-gwa-ra-go would have been angry with Ta-wan-ne-ars if the tomahwawk had struck true?"

Murray wiped beads of perspiration from his face.

"So 'twas Bolling!" he muttered. "Curse the knave! What hath he done?"

"No more than attempted to murder me, sir—as I have attempted to tell you," I answered ironically.

Marjory came forward, hands clasped in expostulation.

"It isn't so! It can't be so! Tell him he lies, sir!" she pleaded with Murray.

He put her gently to one side.

"Peace, peace, my dear," he said. "You do not understand."

"But Bolling is the man you called 'Red Jack!' " she expostulated. "You presented me to him. You told him to be sure to remember my face. You jested about his hair and his evil looks."

"The man is likewise called 'The Red Death,' Mistress Murray," I said.

She turned to me, tears in her eyes.

"Oh, sir, pray you, do not bait me!" she cried. "I would not believe you before, but that is the man's hair, beyond a doubt."

"And what if it is?" said her father kindly, drawing her to him with one arm. "Is that any reason why you should express shame?"

"But he was one of your people, sir. [illegible] told me——"

"Tut, tut, my dear Marjory. You are new to this New World of ours. The frontier is not like Scotland. We must work with what tools we find. I say it to my sorrow—" and he said it furthermore without even the twitch of an eyelid—"I am compelled occasionally to consort with men I might prefer to do without."

He gave his attention once more to me.

"In a word, Master Ormerod, what hath happened that you approach me in so hostile a spirit?"

"In a word, Master Murray," I replied, "your man Bolling, or 'The Red Death,' as he seems to be known in these parts, tried to kill me with knife and hatchet this evening."

"I am constrained to believe you," he said with an appearance of much sorrow, "but I can not hold myself responsible, sir."

"It may be that the governor will not be so indulgent," I commented sarcastically.

Murray drew himself erect.

"Sir," he replied, "as it happens, Bolling quarreled with me this afternoon in the presence of half a dozen well-known citizens of the town, and I dismissed him from my service."

"Pardon me," I said with a laugh, "if I express some——"

"Do you step within," he responded with celerity. "I shall be glad if you will satisfy yourself by questioning witnesses of the dispute. Marjory, will you——"

"I will stay," she said positively.

He shrugged his shoulders and stood aside. I motioned to Marjory, and she reentered first. I walked next, and the Seneca followed me, one hand resting on his knife-hilt.

Murray shut the door behind us, and I found myself in a large room, sufficiently lighted by candles. Five or six men, who had been talking at a table, looked up with interest as we came in. One of them was de Veulle, and I felt rather than saw the massive frame of Ta-wan-ne-ars gather itself together exactly as does the wildcat when he sights his quarry.

The others I did not know. Murray introduced them by names which meant nothing to me, but later Ta-wan-ne-ars told me they were respectable merchants identified with the faction in the province who were hostile to Governor Burnet, and all were for the closest trade relations with Canada.

These men greeted us civilly enough, and gave most of their attention to Ta-wan-ne-ars. De Veulle acknowledged the meeting by a smile that was tinged with mockery. Our clash came when Murray turned to me, after recounting my errand, and said:

"Your companion is evidently a chief, Master Ormerod. Will you identify him?"

Before I could say anything Ta-wan-ne-ars responded for himself.

"I am Ta-wan-ne-ars, of the Clan of the Wolf, war-chief of the Senecas, and nephew to Do-ne-ho-ga-weh, the Guardian of the Western Door of the Long House."

He spoke directly to de Veulle, and the Frenchman's eyes shifted from his level glance.

"Must we have an Indian present?" he muttered. "This is a white man's affair."

"As it happens, this Indian saved my life from a white man's knife," I replied quickly. "He is my brother. I would rather have him here than a woman-stealer."

But I had reckoned without Marjory. She took the situation out of my hands.

"Sir," she said, "you seem to delight in slandering gentlemen who are not disloyal to their faiths. I beseech you, have done. 'Tis a sorry business, and gains naught for you. Get forward with what brought you here."

I marked the relief that shone in de Veulle's eyes. I marked, too, the penetrating glance which Ta-wan-ne-ars bent upon her face. For myself, although I felt sick at heart, I said nothing. There was nothing which I could say.

I turned to Murray again.

"This conversation must be painful to us," I said. "Let us make an end to it. Bolling attacked me, as you know. My friend and brother here saved me and drove him away. We have a lock of Bolling's hair in proof of the attempt.

"The watch are now searching for Bolling. The governor will shortly be apprised. 'Tis in your interest to do what you can to clear yourself of responsibility for so dastardly a crime."

One of the merchants at the table, a very decent-appearing man, soberly dressed and with much good sense in his face, caught me up.

" 'Tis not strange that you should have come to Master Murray after such an attempt as you mention, sir," he began in conciliatory fashion. "But fortunately we were present this afternoon when Master Murray dismissed the man from his employ, in consequence of evidence of his dishonesty and misdealing during Master Murray's absence. Bolling left in a great rage, vowing he would put Master Murray in trouble."

"Aye," spoke up a second merchant, "and sure, the knave must have attacked you hoping 'twould be brought against Master Murray."

"Not to speak of the fact he was in great need of funds, Master Murray having refused to grant certain demands he made," suggested a third."

I bowed.

"Gentlemen," I said, "I am satisfied—that Master Murray hath a stout case. There is no more need be said."

"Ah, but there is more to be said," flared Marjory. "Think shame of yourself, sir, to be forever believing against others motives which you know yourself to be laden with. You were once an honorable man. Why do you not mend your ways and regain the self-respect of your kind?"

"God send there be an honorable man to hand when your need comes, mistress," I said. "Good evening, gentlemen."

MURRAY escorted us to the door.

"I must congratulate you," he said in a low voice. "Faith, you are an enterprising young man. You are doing famously in your new surroundings."

"But I shall not suffer another such attempt as to-night's to pass unanswered," I replied.

"Sure, sir," he said earnestly, "can you not bethink yourself of some trouble in your past which might bring down these troubles upon you!"

I laughed despite myself.

"I can," I agreed. "And so can you. But I would risk denunciation at an extremity, Murray. Red Jack sought the protection of the wilderness. So might I."

"You are safe," he returned. "Believe me or not. 'Tis true."

"You hear?" I said to Ta-wan-ne-ars beside us.

He smiled gravely.

"My brother is safe," he agreed, "for Ta-wan-ne-ars will watch."

"You are thrice fortunate," Murray congratulated me. "You have won the confidence of the noble red man."

Ta-wan-ne-ars looked squarely at him.

"He will win the confidence of the red man, Murray, because he speaks straight. But you speak with the tongue of an Englishman, and think with the mind of a Frenchman."

Murray smiled.

"But always to my own interest, Ta-wan-ne-ars. Well, good luck to the two of you. And do not permit the Keepers to take you alive."

His smile became a sardonic grin.

"The Keepers have their own way with prisoners, you know. 'Tis part of their reward—or so the story goes."

I felt a shock of revulsion against the man. And he was the father of Marjory!

"You double-dyed scoundrel!" I ripped out at him.

"Have I touched your nerves?" he gibed. "Zooks, how sad! Well, I have company. I will bid you good evening."

The door shut behind his mocking grin, and we descended the stairs to the street. Ta-wan-ne-ars walked beside me without speaking until we had left the tavern.

"I understand your thoughts, my brother," he said suddenly. "We go upon the same quest."

"Quest?" I repeated. "What quest?"

"We each seek a soul which is lost, a sick soul."

I remembered his rage against de Veulle, and caught his meaning.

"Yes, that is true of you, Ta-wan-ne-ars. But there is no soul which I have the right to seek."

"Nevertheless, my brother would find the soul of the maiden and guard it," he insisted. "I have seen."

"But I may not help her," I objected. "She will have none of me."

"O my brother," he answered, "once there was one of my people who loved a maiden. And this maiden's soul was taken away by illness and went to dwell with Ata-ent-sic, the Goddess of Lost Souls, who rules the Land of Lost Souls which is behind the Setting Sun. The warrior was bidden in a dream to seek the maiden's soul, and he journeyed for three months to the Setting Sun, past the Abode of Evil, where dwells Ha-ne-go-ate-geh, the Evil Spirit.

"And when he came to the Land of Souls he found his maiden's soul dancing with the other lost souls in a bark cabin before Ata-ent-sic. And Jous-ke-ha, the grandson of Ata-ent-sic, who was a very old man, brought him a pumpkin which had been hollowed out, and told him to place the maiden's soul within. And he did so. And he returned to his people, and made a feast, and after the feast they raised up the maiden's soul out of the pumpkin shell."

He stopped under a flickering lanthorn, which cast a feeble light before the George.

"Surely, my brother, we shall not have to travel so dreadful a journey to regain the souls which we seek?"

I saw the grave smile, with a hint of pleading, on his face; and I reached out and caught his hand.

"Whatever be the end of my search, brother," I said, "I will go to the setting sun, and beyond if need be, to aid you to find the soul which you seek."

"The same words are in my heart, brother," he replied simply.

CHAPTER XII

INTO THE WILDERNESS

"BOLLING hath disappeared," said Governor Burnet. "You will not see him again, save it be in an ambush of the frontier."

We sat in the dining-room of Captain van Horne's house where the governor worked pending the refurbishing of his official residence within the walls of the Fort.

"I have given orders to all officers of troops and town officials that he is to be detained if he ventures to appear," he continued; "but the knave—or, I should say, his master—is too wise. By the way, an express arrived from Fort Orange * last night and reported having spoken Murray's party in the Tappan Zee. He will be a good three days ahead of you, 'twould seem."

"I am not sorry," I answered. "Have you any further instructions for me, sir?"

"Aye. Are you ready to sail?"

"Corlaer just now told me all our gear was aboard the sloop. Ta-wan-ne-ars is watching it."

The governor unfolded the map of the wilderness country which he had exhibited to me during my first visit.

"Above everything else, I must know what is happening at Jagara," he said. "The Doom Trail may wait. The news which Ta-wan-ne-ars brought of the intent of the French to replace Joncaire's trading-post with a stone fort is the most menacing tidings we have had since the peace was signed. It makes manifest what I have always contended: that there can be no real peace whilst we and the French sit cheek by jowl, each striving for more power than the other.

"Peace on paper there may be; but the French will be breaking it, as they have done in the case of Joncaire's post and as they now plan to do by building a fort upon English territory. I must know what they do there, Master Ormerod. I must know beyond a doubt. I can not afford to accept merely the hearsay evidence of the Indians. I must have a man I can trust who will see for himself on the spot."

"Surely, Corlaer——"

The governor brushed away my suggestion.

"Corlaer can not speak French. Moreover, if he could, his face is known along the whole frontier. He and Joncaire are old opponents. No; if he ventured to the post without safe-conduct he would disappear. If he went with a safe-conduct he would see nothing. 'Tis you who must go.

"Masquerade as a Frenchman. There are plenty of lads who go out every year to Canada to have a try at the fur-trade. You should be able to pass for one of them. At any rate 'tis worth the attempt."

"'Tis well worth trying," I agreed. "Also, 'tis possible I may pick up some news of the Trail from Joncaire."

"Possible," he assented; "but keep the Trail in the back of your mind. 'Tis this fort which concerns me now. For look you, Master Ormerod, if I secure proof the French meditate in earnest so grave a breach of the treaty 'twill strengthen by so much my case against Murray. Then might I dare indeed to stir the Iroquois to hostilities against him, as Peter suggested."

"I will do what I may," I promised, rising.

"'Tis well. And be not reluctant to accept advice from Corlaer and the Indians. They are schooled in the forest's craft. Here, too, is a letter to Master Livingston, the Mayor of Fort Orange, and Peter Schuyler, a gentleman of that place who acts upon occasion as my deputy in frontier affairs. You may talk freely with them concerning your mission. Good-by, sir, and be vigilant."

He gave me a hearty clasp of the hand and bowed me out.

In the street Corlaer awaited me.

"Der tide is flooding," he said, and without another word set off at a good round pace.

We came presently to a wharf at the foot of Deye Street, where lay the sloop *Betsy*, her sails unstopped, land-lines slack. She cast off as we stepped aboard, and presently I was looking back over her stern at the dwindling sky-line of the quaint little city. As I looked I recognized the masts of the *New Venture* amongst the shipping in the East River anchorage, and a pang smote me with the realization that she was my last tie with the England which would have none of me for which I hungered with the perverse appetite of one who is denied his greatest wish.

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* Albany.

The masts and their tracery of rigging soon merged in the blue of the afternoon sky; the woods closed down around the scattered buildings of the Out Ward; and we sailed a broad channel which ran between lofty heights of land, reaching hundreds of feet above us like the walls of some gigantic city of the future, fairer and more stupendous than the mind of man had ever dreamed on.

All that afternoon we sailed with a quartering wind, but in the night it shifted and we were compelled to anchor. In the morning we proceeded, but our progress was slow, and with darkness we must anchor again. So likewise on the next day a storm beat down upon us from the hulking mountains which rimmed the wide expanse of the river called by the old Dutch settlers the Tappan Zee; and with only a rag of sail we sped for shelter under the lee of an island.

On the fourth day the river bore us through a country of low, rolling hills and plains that lifted to mountainous heights in the distance. There were farms by the water's edge, and sometimes the imposing mansion of a patroom with its attendant groups of buildings occupied by servants, slaves and tenants. Several times we passed villages, and occasionally a sloop similar to our own hailed us and exchanged the latest news of the river.

On the fifth day toward sunset we sighted in the distance the stockades of Fort Orange, which the English were beginning to call Albany, nestling close to the riverbank under the shelter of a steep hillock. We made the tottery pier after darkness had fallen, and hastened up into the town, delegating to the master of the sloop and his boy the task of conveying our baggage to the tavern kept by Humphrey Taylor.

Corlaer and I left Ta-wan-ne-ars at the tavern to receive the baggage, whilst we called upon Mayor Livingston. He was preparing for his bed, but on my sending up word by the slave that I carried a letter from the governor he tucked his shirt into his breeches and came down to us. From him we learned that Murray had spent but twenty-four hours in the town and was gone two days since.

"Did he say where?" I inquired curiously.

Master Livingston chuckled.

"He caused it to be circulated that he was going upon a round of his 'trading-stations' to correct some slackness which had developed during his absence. 'Tis his usual excuse when he disappears."

"He was not alone?"

"No. He was accompanied by a Frenchman and that scoundrel, Tom, as well as by some misguided young female."

"She was his daughter," I said.

"So he said, I believe," agreed Master Livingston negligently.

"But I am sure she is," I insisted. "There can be no doubt——"

"Then I am vastly sorry for her lot," he replied good-humoredly.

"Which way didt he go?" asked Corlaer.

"The usual way. He followed the Iroquois Trail to the Mohawk, then struck north. We have followed him so far many times; but always when our scouts have pressed the pursuit they have encountered strange bands of warriors who have killed or captured them or driven them away."

"Did you see aught of the Frenchman?" I struck in.

"Yes; he did me the honor of calling upon me, and said he was on a mission from his King to report upon the conduct of the Government of Canada, especially with a view to the maintenance of good relations with our colonists."

"The hypocrite!" I interjected.

"He was smooth of tongue, I grant you," admitted Master Livingston. "He had the grace to acquaint me he was taking advantage of Master Murray's company to secure protection through the frontier."

"Didt Murray hafe many men?" put in Corlaer.

"Half a dozen whites of Bolling's kind, and as many nondescript Indians who were painted like Mohicans."

"They wouldt be Cahnuagas," amended Corlaer.

"Yes," assented the Mayor; "but if you are to go to Jagara, as the governor's letter advises me, you need not concern yourself with Murray at this time. What do you propose to do?"

"We have discussed the journey on the voyage up the river," I replied; "and we are agreed 'tis best that we go first to the Seneca country, where Ta-wan-ne-ars can pick up the latest news. There we can concert our plan in detail and decide how best I am to be able to gain Joncaire's confidence."

"You are wise to be cautious," said Livingston. "Joncaire is no easy man to fool. Believe me, sir, he is the ablest officer the French have, and a bitter thorn in our side."

"*Ja!*" exclaimed Corlaer with unaccustomed vigor.

"Peter knows," laughed the mayor. "Eh, Peter?"

Corlaer's reply was indecently explicit in its description of Joncaire.

"Peter once prepared a clever trap for Joncaire," continued Master Livingston, seeing I did not understand my companion's rage. "He was to be captured whilst he feasted with some friends amongst the Senecas. But Joncaire got wind of it, and instead 'twas Peter who escaped capture by a lucky slit in a bark-house wall."

Livingston would have persuaded us to stay the night at his house, but we had told Ta-wan-ne-ars we would return to the tavern, so we let him get to his bed and sought our own.

In the morning we visited Captain Schuyler, but he was absent, riding some lands he held in the vicinity. We spent the forenoon in purchasing for me the regular trappings of the frontiersman—moccasins of ankle height and leather leggings and shirt, all Indian in manufacture. The weapons Juggins had supplied me were warmly praised by my comrades.

For the rest there were slim stores of salt, sugar, powder, flints and ball to be packed upon our backs. My garments of civilization I made into a package which I consigned to the innkeeper's care.

Personally I did not care in that moment whether I ever donned them again. I liked my companions. I liked the loose, yielding clothing I had acquired. I liked the feel of arms at my side and in my hands. I liked the sun and wind in my hair, for I refused to wear the fur-cap which the forest-runners affected and went like an Indian, bareheaded. I liked the close grip on the earth which the moccasins gave my feet.

At noon we mustered at the tavern door, ready for our plunge into the wilderness. It meant little to Ta-wan-ne-ars and Corlaer. For them 'twas an old story. But to me it meant everything—how completely everything I did not appreciate at that early day.

The Seneca inspected me with a grave smile as I appeared, fully arrayed for the first time.

"My brother wears Mohawk moccasins," he said. "We will find Seneca moccasins for him when we reach my country."

"Do I appear as a warrior should?" I inquired anxiously.

"Even to the scalp-lock," he assured me, in reference to my long hair.

"Can you walk t'irty miles a day?" demanded Corlaer seriously.

"I have done so."

"You will do idt efery day now," he remarked grimly.

We took the road to Schenectady. It was the last white man's road I was to see, and I long remembered its broad surface and the sunlight coming down between the trees on either hand and the farms with their log houses and stockades.

But I knew I was on the frontier at last, for the stockades were over-high for the mere herding of cattle and the house-walls were loop-holed. In several of the villages there were square, log-built forts, two stories tall, with the top story projecting out beyond the lower, so that the garrison could fire down along the line of the walls.

'Twas sixteen miles to Schenectady, and night had fallen when we hailed the gate for admission. There was a parley between Corlaer and the watch before we were admitted, but in the end the huge balks of timber creaked open just wide enough for us to squeeze through.

"You are cautions, friend," I said to the gatekeeper as I set my shoulder beside his and helped him shut the gate.

"And you are a stranger, my master," he retorted, "or you would never think it strange for Schenectady folk to use caution."

"How is that?" I asked.

And he told me in few words and simply how Monsieur d'Erville had surprized the town in his father's time and massacred the inhabitants.

"But now you have peace," I objected.

He looked at me suspiciously.

"Are you a friend of Andrew Murray?" he asked.

"Anything but that."

"Then talk not of peace, sir. Peace here will last until the French and their savages are ready to strike. No longer. It may be tonight. It may not be for twenty years—if we see to it that the French do not thrive at our expense."

WE WERE afoot again early the next morning. Beyond Schenectady a few farms rimmed the road, but presently we came to a clearing, and on the west side a green barrier stretched across our way. From end to end of the clearing it reached, and as far on either hand as I could see, a high, tangled, apparently impervious green wall of vegetation. 'Twas the outer rampart of the wilderness.

Some men were working in a field beside the road, and I saw that they had their guns beside them.

"They are armed," I cried.

"So are you," replied Corlaer.

"But——"

"This is der frontier," he said. "Eferybody is armed. Eferybody is on watch."

"Why?"

"Idt is der frontier."

I held my peace, until we reached the forest-wall. Then curiosity mastered me again.

"The road stops here," I said to Ta-wan-ne-ars. "How shall we go on?"

He smiled.

"The road of the white man stops—yes," he answered. "But the road of the Ho-de-no-sau-nee begins."

"What is that?"

He made no answer, but kept on his way until we were under the bole of the first of the forest trees.

"Does my brother Ormerod see anything now?" he asked.

I shook my head, puzzled.

"My brother has much to learn of the forest and its ways," he commented.

He put his hand on my arm and led me around the trunk, Corlaer following with a broad grin on his face.

There at my feet was a deep, narrow slot in the earth, a groove some eighteen inches wide and perhaps twelve inches deep, that disappeared into the gloom which reigned under the interlacing boughs overhead. There was shrubbery and underbrush on every side, but none grew in or on the edge of the slot. It did not go straight, but crookedly like a snake, curving and twisting as it chanced to meet a mossy boulder or a tree too big to be readily felled or uprooted. As I stooped over it I saw that its bottom and steeply sloping sides were hard-packed, beaten down by continual pressure, the relentless pressure of countless human feet for generations and centuries.

"My brother is standing upon the Wa-a-gwen-ne-yuh, the Great Trail of my people," said Ta-wan-ne-ars proudly. "It is the highway of the People of the Long House. Day after day we shall follow it, along the valley of the Mohawks, into the land of the Oneidas and Tuscaroras, on into the valley where the Onondagas keep alight the sacred Council Fire which was kindled by Da-ga-no-weda and Ha-yo-wont-ha, the Founders of the League, and on, still on, my white brother, past the country of the Cayugas to the villages of my own people whom you call the Senecas, and at the last to the Thunder Waters of Jagara, where Joncaire works to conquer the domain of the Long House for the French King."

"But over this same trail, Ta-wan-ne-ars, the warriors of the Long House shall burst upon the French to frustrate that plan!" I exclaimed.

"Aye, so it shall be," he replied.

Corlaer sighed and resettled his pack on his shoulders.

"We hafe much distance to go today," he said.

Ta-wan-ne-ars instantly led the way into the groove of the trail, and as if instinctively swung into an easy loping trot. I followed him and the Dutchman brought up the rear.

It was cool under the trees, for the sun seldom penetrated the foliage, dense already although it was only the fag-end of Spring. And it was very silent—terribly, oppressively silent. The crack of a stick underfoot was like a musket-shot. The padding of our feet on the resilient leaf-mold was like the low rolling of muffled drums. The timorous twittering of birds seemed to set the echoes flying.

Yet I was amazed when Ta-wan-ne-ars halted abruptly in mid-afternoon, and inclined his ear toward the trail behind us.

"What is it?" I asked, and so completely had the spirit of the forest taken possession of me that I whispered the words.

"Something is following us," he answered.

Corlaer put his ear to the bottom of the trail, and a curious expression crossed his face.

"*Ja*," was all he said.

CHAPTER XIII

THE TRAILERS

"SHALL we return and face them?" I asked eagerly.

Ta-wan-ne-ars permitted himself a smile of friendly sarcasm.

"If we can hear them surely they can hear us," he said. "No, we will keep on. There is a place farther along the trail from which we can look back upon them. Come, Ormerod, you and I will run ahead. Peter will follow us."

"But why does he not come with us?" I objected. "If there is danger——"

"If there is danger we will all front it together," interrupted Ta-wan-ne-ars. "Peter is to walk behind us so that the trailers may not detect our haste."

"*Ja,*" assented Peter.

Ta-wan-ne-ars shifted his musket to his shoulders, and broke into a long, loping stride. I followed him.

Half a mile up the trail we came to a clearing where some storm of bygone years had battered down a belt of sturdy timber. We ran for another half-mile beyond this before Ta-wan-ne-ars slowed his pace and commenced to study the leaf barriers that walled the slot of the trail. Presently he stopped.

"Walk in my tracks, brother," he said. "And be certain that you do not bruise a twig."

With the utmost caution he parted the screen of underbrush on our right hand, and revealed a tunnel through the greenery into which he led the way, hesitating at each step until he had gently thrust aside the intervening foliage. Once in the tunnel, however, his care was abandoned, and he ran quickly to the trunk of a huge pine which soared upward like a mounumental column, high above the surrounding trees. He leaned his musket against the pitchy bole.

"The symbol of the Long House," he said, tapping the swelling girth of it. "Strength and symmetry and grandeur. We will climb, brother."

He swung himself up into the branches, which formed a perfect ladder, firm under foot, behind the screen of the pine-needles. When the other tree-tops were beneath us, he straddled a bough and cleared a loop-hole from which we might look out over the forest we had traversed.

"How did you know this tree was here?" I questioned curiously.

"Upon occasion enemies penetrate the Long House, so we must be able to see who follows us."

"Do you know that those who follow us are enemies?"

He shook his head.

"If they were friends 'twas strange they did not try to overtake us, brother. My people like company when they travel."

He said no more, but fixed his eyes on the forest below. It swept away in vast billows of green that rolled in gigantic combers across ridge and hillock and tossed plumes of spray aloft whenever a breeze rustled the tree-tops. There was an effect of continuity, of boundless size such as the ocean gives. From my lofty perch I could survey the four quarters of the horizon, and in every direction the forest stretched to the sky-line. The Great Trail of the Iroquois was hidden from sight. The one gap in the vista of emerald and jade was the narrow slash of the clearing we had recently crossed.

I saw that Ta-wan-ne-ars had concentrated his attention upon this spot, where the exit of the trail was indicated by a ragged fringe of undergrowth. We looked for so long, without anything happening that my eyeballs ached. But at last there was a movement like the miniature upheaval which is caused by an ant in breaking ground. Boughs quivered, and a figure appeared in the open. 'Twas Corlaer. He glanced around him and strode on. In a moment he had passed the clearing and disappared in the forest.

Ta-wan-ne-ars hitched forward and peered through the loop-hole with tense muscles. And again there was a wait which seemed endless. My eyelids blinked from the strain of watching.

The desolation and loneliness of the wilderness were so complete that it seemed inconceivable another human being could be within view. And whilst this thought occupied my mind a dark figure crawled on hands and knees from the mouth of the trail.

The newcomer feared a trap. His ear sought the ground. His eye studied the sky above him. He looked in every direction. But his instincts were baffled. He stole forward across the clearing with musket poised. At that distance all we could see of his costume was the clump of feathers that bristled from his scalp-lock.

He followed Peter into the trail on our side of the clearing, and there was a second and briefer pause. Then as silently as ghosts a string of figures flitted into the clearing. There were six of them, each with musket in the hollow of his arm, each with bristling feather headdress. They walked one behind the other, with a peculiar effect, even at that distance, of stealth and watchfulness.

Ta-wan-ne-ars emitted a guttural grunt, quite unlike his usual rather musical utterance.

“Cahnuagas!” he exclaimed, and spat.

“What?” I answered.

“Down!” he rasped. “Down! The time is scant!”

All the way during our descent he was muttering to himself in his own tongue, and a black scowl covered his face. At the foot of the pine he snatched up his musket without a word, and turned into the green tunnel that debouched upon the screen of the trail.

As we stepped into the worn slot Peter came into view.

“Well?” he said phlegmatically.

“Cahnuagas,” answered Ta-wan-ne-ars.

The Seneca’s face became convulsed with fury.

“Cahnuaga dogs! They dare to invade territory of the Long House!”

“We can cross der Mohawk to der south branch of der trail,” proposed Corlaer. “They wouldt not dare to follow us there.”

“No,” snarled Ta-wan-ne-ars; “we shall not step aside for them. We will attend to them ourselves.”

“Hafe you a plan?” inquired the Dutchman amicably.

He never lost his temper when other people did.

“Yes,” said the Seneca briefly. “And now we will go along as if we did not know they were near us.”

“Are they not likely to attack?” I interposed.

“No, they will not attack unless they have to, for we are still near the Mohawk Castle, although ’tis upon the opposite bank of the river. They will leave us alone until night.”

“But why can not we attack them?”

A look of ferocity which was almost demoniac changed his usually pleasant features into an awful mask.

“In an ambuscade one might escape. No, my brother Ormerod, we will wait until they attack us. Then——”

He paused significantly.

“Not one of the Keepers shall return to tell Murray how his brothers died.

We took up the march. ’Twas already mid-afternoon, and shortly the dimness of twilight descended upon the trail, as the level rays of the setting sun were turned aside by the interlacing masses of vegetation.

Once, I remember, we passed along the edge of a swampy tract, and I saw for the first time that industrious animal, the beaver, whose pelt was the principal stake for which France and England contended in the great game upon the issue of which depended the future of a continent. They had erected a dam across one end of a stream to make a pond, and their engineers were busily at work floating trees into place to reenforce a weak point in the structure. Other trees a few feet from the trail were gnawed in preparation for felling.

“How is it they are able to exist here so close to the white man’s country?” I called to Ta-wan-ne-ars.

He flung a haughty look across his shoulder. Since we had identified the Cahnuagas a startling change had transformed him. The veneer of deferential courtesy which ordinarily he wore was cracked. He was all Indian. More than that, he was contemptuous of what was not Indian. Aye, of whatever was not Iroquois like himself, of the bone and sinew of the League.

“This is not the white man’s country,” he answered. “You are within the portals of the Long House.”

“But the beaver’s skin is no less valuable to the Indian than to the white man,” I persisted.

“Yes,” he agreed, “yet the Indian does not slay game only for gain. If it were not for the dam those beavers built the Great Trail we walk upon would be overflowed. So long ago in the time of my forefathers that tradition can not fix the date the forefathers of those beavers built that dam, and when the Founders drove the trail they decreed that the beavers should be safe forever—that the trail might be safe.”

TWILIGHT faded into dusk and still we kept on. Ta-wan-ne-ars had eyes like a cat’s, and I, too, accustomed myself to perception of hanging branches and the unexpected turns and twists in the groove of the path. The stars were out in the sky overhead when we stepped from the shelter of the forest into a rocky dell divided by a tiny brook.

"We will camp here," said Ta-wan-ne-ars.

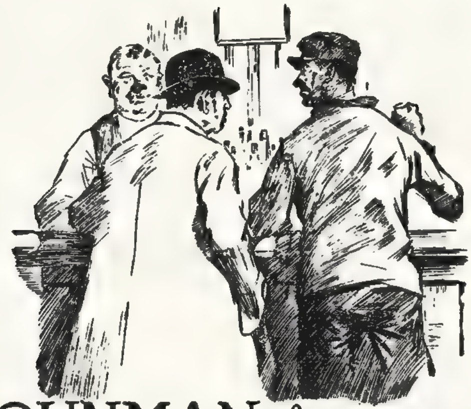
He rested his musket on a boulder and began to collect firewood.

"Why a fire?" I asked.

"The trailers must not think we suspect them," he replied curtly. "If we lit no fire they would know for certain that we were suspicious."

I helped him, whilst Corlaer crouched by the opening of the trail on watch. We soon had a respectable pile of wood, but before kindling it the Seneca bade us strip off our leathern shirts and stuffed them with underbrush into a semblance of human shapes. A third figure to represent himself he contrived out of the packs and several branches.

TO BE CONTINUED



EV'RYBODY LIKES A GUNMAN

by MAX BONTER

"I WANT this 'New York Roddy!'"

The chief looked up from the old-fashioned mahogany desk behind which he sat glowering. Ire, strong and ill-controlled, blazed in his deep-set eyes. He thrust a slip of paper at the subordinate standing in deferential silence beside his chair.

"Blackson, I want this 'New York Roddy!'" he repeated harshly, shutting his heavy jaws with a snap. "Some of those fellows are beginning to imagine that they own the subway."

The chief delivered certain other supplementary instructions before wrathfully resuming his review of the latest daily instalment of "Criminology of the City of New York" that was being unceasingly compiled, night and day—not by his fantom collabotaors, but by the less amorphous police-court representatives of the daily press.

The operative took the paper and lifted his hand in a perfunctory semi-salute. Quickly he left the unpretentious base headquarters where society's defensive brain-force was centralized and at bav before the increasingly vicious assaults of the underworld.

Along Mulberry Street for a block or two, thence into a side street and finally through a squalid hallway and up a rickety stair into a hall room on the top floor of a tenement house, the operative made his rapid way. Here the neat serge suit and the Oxford shoes and the derby hat were removed and thrust into the temporary oblivion of a closet; while from the drawers of a battered dresser came forth overalls, soiled and patched; a pair of heavy brogans black with coal-dust and a fireman's jumper and cap.

Some charcoal and a box of shoe-blacking were then utilized for the purpose of metamorphosing his clean, alert, man-hunting physiognomy into the less conspicuous visage of a humble heaver of coal. Under the operative's deft manipulation each of his eyes presently acquired a shadowy circumference. Smudge-patches invaded the white contours of his cheeks and small clots of black matter appeared in ears and nostrils. The palms of his hands, the knuckle wrinkles and the semi-circular fissures between the cuticle and the finger-nails were appropriately mapped with grime.

Having spread open upon the dresser the slip of paper that the chief had given him, the operative, while he worked, read in typewritten brevity:

Age: About 40
Hgt: About 5' 6"
Build: heavy
Eyes: blue
Hair: dk bro
Ruddy
Dip
Operates subway
Frequents Mott St.
Ex Navy D. D.
Gunman

The concluding word "gunman" caught the operative's eyes. He rummaged about until he located a dirty sweater that he pulled on, well down over his right-hand hip pocket.

A FIREMAN sauntered nonchalantly along the old Bowery. Across Chatham Square he proceeded and thence into Mott Street, where he began to mingle carelessly with Chinese, street beggars, pickpockets, bootleggers, pushcart vendors, bums, queer looking women boldly masquerading in artificial attractiveness and all the rest of the mysterious beings that clutter society's big back-yard. The coal-heaver strolled leisurely along, passing through a sort of dirty, Brobdignagian toyland and apparently deep in contemplation of the bird-cage architecture around him. He appeared to be amusing himself hugely at the expense of those weird Oriental ideas upon the subject of the fortification of the inner man, as expressed by strange-looking, stringed comestibles hanging festooned in the purveyors' windows.

The fireman rolled a "butt." He puffed and prowled about with a keen scrutiny masked by seeming casualness. Across the street stood a saloon—one of the new isolated strongholds of the wets that had so far resisted the batteries of the advancing drys. Into this haven of his kind the fireman made his way. With a jack-tar hitch of his overalls he rolled over to the bar with a deep-sea gait and clamped down a half-dollar. The short, dark-skinned barkeeper glanced at the coin and then at the fireman—at his cap, his jumper, his smudgy face, his grimy hands. The constricting folds of teetotalism were drawing tighter and tighter around the land and men just as astute as he had already been caught napping. So the bartender continued scrutinizing, hesitant.

"Been here before—lots o' times—off the ship," argued the supplicant, twirling the coin expectantly. Appeal was in the look he directed into the bartender's autocratic eye. He looked exactly like a thirsty coal-heaver would look when prospecting for a drink in these grim, prohibitive days.

"The guy looks all right, Joe; give 'im a drink," spoke up a short man standing at the back end of the bar and facing the door.

The fireman glanced gratefully at the speaker. He was about five feet six inches in height. His eyes were blue. His hair appeared to be dark-brown, flecked with gray. His face was ruddy—very ruddy—its ruddiness evidently enhanced by alcohol, as naturally suggested by the presence of that small glass on the bar in front of him. He wore a gray overcoat. Kindliness sparkled in his eye. His attitude toward life seemed to be one of the utmost joviality.

"Have a drink with *me*, pal," was his smiling invitation to the coal-heaver. "I'm blowin'."

"Sure I'll drink with you, mate," acquiesced the fireman.

The man in the gray overcoat walked over and stood beside the fireman, meanwhile indifferently tossing a bill into sight upon the bar, using his left hand in the process. His right hand was hidden in the pocket of his overcoat. The bartender's gaze comprehensively swept both back and front approaches to his bulwark and then, observing nothing disconcerting in the offing, he drew a bottle from its hiding-place and poured out the two drinks of whisky.

"Here's how, mate."

"Here's luck."

Both men drank. The man in the gray overcoat for this purpose used his left hand. His right hand was still in his pocket and he kept it there. He stood at the fireman's left in such manner that his right hand overcoat pocket and the fireman's left side were in juxtaposition. The fireman out of the tail of his eye noted this tactical arrangement and he mentally cursed his own tardiness, as well as the sweater that he had pulled well down over his right hand hip-pocket. Still, no hint of his interior tumult escaped from the fireman's eyes. He gulped the whisky with evident eagerness and in just such a way as a deep-sea fireman who had importuned a bartender for a drink would be expected to comport himself. The look that he turned upon the man in the gray overcoat was brimming with contentment.

"Have one with me, mate," he offered generously.

"That's all right," returned the other, holding up an imperious left hand. "I'm blowin'. What ship you off?"

"The *Georgetown*—in from the West Indies."

"You look like an old service man."

"Sure, I'm an ex-gob."

"Thought so," went on the man in the gray coat. "I can 'most always tell a gob—been one myself. But—do you know who *I* am?"

"Why, no," replied the fireman with a wondering look.

"Ever hear of 'New York Roddy?'" The stranger's voice was smooth and his smile was as clear and guileless as that of a cherub is supposed to be.

"No," lied the fireman.

"Well, now I'm goin' to *see* if you're all right. *I'm* New York Roddy. Do you *want* me?"

"Do I *want* you? Why should *I* want you, Jack?" queried the fireman with an assumption of great surprize.

"Because if you *want* me, you're not goin' to *get* me. You won't even get as far as that door!"

The smile on New York Roddy's flushed face broadened into the full bloom of merriment; but the fireman was looking quite innocently and courageously into the laughing eyes of the gunman.

"I'm not lookin' for anybody. All I'm lookin' for is a drink."

"All right. Have another, then. Give us a couple more shots, Joe."

The dark-skinned servitor complied at once with the gunman's request, saying nothing and taking no apparent interest in the conversation. The barroom was empty of customers except for the fireman and the gunman, but one or two habitués seemed to be stirring about in the back room. The bartender poured out two additional glasses of fusel oil and the men drank, clinking glasses. The right hand of the gunman remained in his overcoat pocket. The fireman kept both his hands in plain view on the bar. He loathed the vile liquor but he did not call for anything "soft." Firemen do not usually go into saloons to buy and to drink what they contemptuously term "belly-wash."

Neither did he attempt to dispose of any of the cheap liquor *via* the convenient cuspidor route. New York Roddy's laughing eyes held vision as subtly sure as a cat's and the fireman sensed with unerring accuracy the nature of the potential destruction concealed in that gray overcoat pocket.

"These subway suckers cert'nly make me lawf," confided the gunman to the fireman with an amused wink. "Yesterday in a down-town express some nifty operator nicked a dame for her hand-bag. When she got wise she let out an awful squawk.

"'Oo, mah bag!' she yells like a sheep. 'I had fifty dollahs in it!'

"As a matter of fact, Jack, lyin' ain't one of my accomplishments and you can therefore take it from me that there was only fifteen dollars in that hand-bag. That uncovers the female system of profiteerin', eh? I suppose the simple lookin' guy she had with her had to put up for it in order to save his reputation as a gallant escort. That dame made a cool thirty-five on that transaction on a fifteen principal. Don't they learn, eh? She ought to be in Wall Street. Pays to get robbed sometimes, eh? That's why ev'rybody likes a gunman."

New York Roddy laughed joyously.

"Maybe you think I'm sort of careless because I'm discussin' my personal affairs with strangers so free and easy-like," he went on in an amused tone. "Well, to tell you the truth, I've been drinkin' for a day or two and I'm therefore kind of reckless. If the people back of me got wise to me drinkin', they'd drop me. They want us operators to have clear heads. Why, sure, we've got bankers, you know—us guys—same as any other business. You'd be more surprized yet if you knew who was back of us guys. Funny world, eh? Never what it seems. Just reminds me I'm gettin' broke. Want to see how easy I can get fifty dollars? Wait; I'll show you. Ev'rybody likes a gunman."

A TALL, dark-featured man—evidently the proprietor of the "joint" had entered and walked behind the bar where, Midas-like, he was busily thumbing over the money he had mulcted in various ways from the public as well as from the Treasury of the United States.

"I want fifty dollars," said New York

Roddy simply, turning toward this individual. Without even lifting his head from his task the proprietor counted out five of his ten-dollar bills and thrust them backward upon the bar in the direction of the gunman, who picked them up with his left hand and clumped them into a little ball beside his glass.

"Told you ev'rybody likes a gunman," he said smilingly. "Fill 'em up, Joe."

New York Roddy was very evidently on home soil. This jolly sniper against society was as strongly entrenched here as a machine gunner behind his barricade. The fireman suspected that the "joint" was patronized chiefly by a regular underworld clientèle, and that New York Roddy, who had been operating boldly of late, was suspicious of the errand of every stranger, no matter what his garb might be, who intruded therein.

"Have a drink, dad," said the gunman affably, turning toward a tall dignified old gentleman who had entered unobtrusively from the back room. He might have been either a deacon or a prohibitionist—so eminently proper and respectable did he appear in his neat black suit and full beard, gazing about him with fatherly, bespectacled eyes. After he had drunk and departed Roddy nudged the fireman in the region of his left ribs with something small and hard that he held in his right-hand overcoat pocket.

"See that old lad?" asked the gunman good-humoredly. "That dignified stall fools lots of people. You'd never think he was one of the slickest operators in the game, would you? What ship were you on in the outfit, Jack? Fill 'em up, Joe."

The fireman began to be exceedingly perturbed. Already he had swallowed several glasses of the vile stimulant, just as any fireman on shore-leave looking around for liquor would be expected to do. He realized that to back down now, when drinks were coming his way so frequently and without cost to him, would prod New York Roddy's lurking suspicions into immediate certainty.

As a rule when firemen go ashore and begin to drink, they keep right on drinking —that is, as long as financial or fraternal considerations permit. They almost invariably drink as much as they can get. At any rate these were the well-established firemanly characteristics as observable in the Mott Street neighborhood; and this coal-heaver, knowing that the ice under his feet was thin, decided not to risk the slightest chance of detection.

He was behind the enemy's barricade—within the enemy's power, even, and not being gifted with sleight-of-hand attributes, he did not try to dispose of the liquor through any channel other than the logical road to his gullet. He knew that under New York Roddy's imperturbable joviality was a nature like a tiger's and that his merry orbs owned the swift vision of a lynx.

The fireman saw with grim foreboding that this was an issue to be decided by John Barleycorn, New York Roddy or himself. Which of them could swallow the greater amount of this vile decoction and still live and retain his balance and his faculties? Being forced at the point of a revolver to drink himself drunk—that was a brand-new experience in a career already replete with novel sensations.

What effect would further consumption of alcohol have upon the disposition of New York Roddy? Would he ultimately become sufficiently careless or sufficiently assured of the fireman's harmlessness to remove the muzzle of his gun from the direction of the fireman's ribs long enough to enable the latter to dive under his sweater and produce his own artillery? That was the question. Or, on the other hand, would he himself eventually become so maudlin from the liquor that he would lose control of himself and betray the secret of his presence?

It seemed to him, in fact, that this was the very purpose that was hidden back of the gunman's smiling eyes. Confound his sweater and his hesitation at the start! That was the fatal combination that he allowed to beat him thus far. New York Roddy, like a good general, had taken and held the initiative; and now the fireman knew that even one suspicious move of his own right hand in the direction of his hip pocket would have resulted— Well, the coal-heaver felt that his was a rather useful career and that he would as lief have it prolonged. "Want to see me get another fifty?" asked Roddy with good-humored braggadocio.

"I guess you can get it all right, partner," admitted the fireman with a wink. He continued to keep both his hands in plain view on the bar and to drink dutifully, as an honest fireman should; because this fireman was an artist in his line—coal-heaving or otherwise—even if he did sometimes miscalculate.

"Sure, I can get it all right," agreed New York Ruddy. "Don't you know ev'rybody likes a gunman? What ship did you say you were on, in the outfit, Jack?"

"*Columbia*—below decks."

"What? The *old 'Columbia?'* "

Roddy was staring at the fireman in incredulous wonder.

"Why, she was *my* old wagon!" exclaimed the gunman. "When were you on her, Jack? Were you on her durin' the time of Old Rollins? Were you on her when we had the riot in Tampico? *Now*, I'm goin' to find out whether you're all right or not," he asserted with grim emphasis, his voice dropping for a moment its mask of merriment. "Fill 'em up, Joe."

The fireman's brain was beginning to stumble in the performance of its duties. Old Octopus Alcohol was starting to wrap his tentacles about its normal functioning processes. New York Roddy was obviously more used to drinking than he. Undoubtedly he could handle the stuff better. The coal-heaver gripped the bar firmly with both hands, summoning all his scattering powers of control.

"By Heaven! I won't get drunk," was his fierce mental resolve.

The gunman still kept his hand in the pocket of his overcoat. The fireman could plainly see the menacing little hillock of cloth made by the weapon's elevated muzzle. The hand that held it was as steady as the imitation mahogany fixture in front of him. Its point did not waver.

"Sure, I was through the Tampico fuss," admitted the coal-heaver, his voice sounding distant to his own consciousness. "Seems to me I've seen you before. Didn't you wear a mustache, once?"

"Now you're gettin' there!" exclaimed Roddy in growing excitement. "I was classed at the time, but I jumped ship—I and my buddy. In fact I was the guy that started the scrap with the greasers. I got a few shots of that *mezcal* under my belt and I wanted to own the town."

HE DRANK another glass of whisky. He, too, was beginning to show to some extent the effect of the alcohol he had imbibed. His eyes were like flaming points, but his gaze was nevertheless steady and sure. He began to scrutinize the fireman very closely, studying the features beneath their smudgy disguise.

"By ——! Now I know you! You're Blackson!" he suddenly shouted. "But you weren't a fireman then; you were a jimmy legs!"

"Jimmy legs" when translated from the "gob" dialect into English means "master-at-arms," the enlisted police aboard ship.

"And you must be Dan Rodman," said the fireman.

The two men stared at each other. Twenty years had worked many changes. Slowly the fireman pulled up the sleeve of his jumper, disclosing to view a long, ragged scar extending from his wrist half-way up his right forearm.

"That's what a Mexican's *cuchillo* did to me when I was tryin' to drag you away from the greasers—you and your buddy—after you had started the fuss."

"Blackson—jimmy legs," muttered the gunman, looking askance at the overalled figure beside him. "You know what happened to me afterwards, don't you, Blackson?"

"I heard you got 'bobbed.' "

"The skipper shoved me in front of a general court-martial for jumpin' ship and startin' all the trouble ashore. You know I had a pretty bum record, anyhow. Well, to be brief about it, they made me 'Dan Rodman, D. D.,' and not doctor of divinity, either. They handed me a dishonorable discharge tacked on to a year in the mill. In other words, a year and a 'bob-tail.' In other words, a year and a kick-out. Old Rollins gave me a long and fatherly talk. He said he was very sorry but that he had to do it on account of my bad record. 'For the good o' the service,' he said."

The two men continued gazing at each other, brushing away from their memories the accumulated mists of twenty years.

"Drink up," said the gunman tersely. "Fill 'em up, Joe."

He looked thoughtful. He still held his hand in his overcoat pocket and drank more whisky.

"For the good of the service!" he laughed. "Well, maybe I'd have been different if I'd started off on a better tack, Blackson. But I've always been a wild bird. You know how it is. Got to have action. If I can't get it on the level I'll get it some other way. You should have let the greasers get me in Tampico, Blackson. I wasn't worth gettin' carved up for, that way. Look at all the trouble I'm causin' you now!"

He laughed harshly, directing a keen look into the fireman's eyes. The coal-heaver was silent. He was thinking of the look in the chief's eyes when he had roared——

"I want this 'New York Roddy.' "

Let him come and get him then, was the fireman's thought. All that *he* wanted to do at that moment was to get *away* from him. Here, standing close beside him, was the notorious gunman that the chief wanted—the old shipmate that he had saved from death in Mexico twenty years before. Here he was, with a dozen drinks of whisky in his insides, his right hand still in his overcoat pocket and that menacing little hill of cloth still pointing upward toward the fireman's left ribs. New York Roddy had not for one second relaxed his guard.

"*Jimmy Legs* then, *fireman* now, eh? I don't believe you're a fireman, Blackson! You're after me, all right, but you'll never take me!" suddenly shouted the gunman with great vehemence, his suspicions at last crystallizing into conviction. "You took me away from the Mexicans, Blackson, but you'll never take me out of here!"

Through the alcoholic haze that obscured his brain the coal-heaver was wondering vaguely why Roddy didn't shoot and end the suspense. Life with him was only a gamble, anyway. That was the way of his profession. Many a time in the past he had trifled with sudden death, even as he was standing beside it now. That he, of all men, should have been chosen to apprehend his old shipmate—this jolly, reckless, good-hearted New York Roddy that organized society wanted! Bah! Life was nothing but a queer muddle, anyway!

There is a certain stage in the drinking of alcohol when the addict's being becomes taut and sensitized like the strings of a harp, registering the slightest promptings of emotion. At such times softness takes the drinker completely in its embrace. Staid and dignified natures often break down and weep when in this predicament or otherwise surrender the key to the strong-box of their feelings; while in men of action this period is usually fruitful of some impulsive and generous act. Harshness fades temporarily out of sinners, leaving them soft and defenseless against the accusing stings of outraged conscience.

So they stood—the gunman and the fireman—both drunk, but the gunman standing his liquor the better of the two. The voice of the gunman seemed to be reaching the firemen's consciousness from afar.

"For the good o' the service," New York Roddy was smilingly repeating.

A soft light crept into his eyes and a touch of something that was almost like womanly sweetness played about his lips.

"I might have turned into a decent guy some day after I'd settled down," he mused in a half-whispered tone from which all harshness had fled, "but you buttin' in like this don't give a guy a chance."

Swift resolve leaped into the gunman's eyes. From the pocket of the gray overcoat came suddenly into view the formidable steel outlines of a .45 Colt. The revolver's grim eye was pointing directly at the fireman. The latter's senses were too much dulled with alcohol to experience fear. He was merely wondering what the sudden change would feel like. He caught a fleeting glimpse of the proprietor and the bartender ducking beneath the bar. Then a natural impulse toward self-preservation prompted him to reach frantically with his right hand toward his hip pocket.

"Keep your hands on that bar!" shouted New York Roddy in a firm clear voice.

The loud voice of his big weapon roared through the confined stillness.

THE detective blinked his eyes and found he could open them wide. The gun had fallen from Rodman's hand and was lying on the floor. The gunman was gripping the bar and swaying curiously back and forth. Blood trickled from a hole in the side of his head. The detective savagely broke away from the alcoholic impotence that bound him.

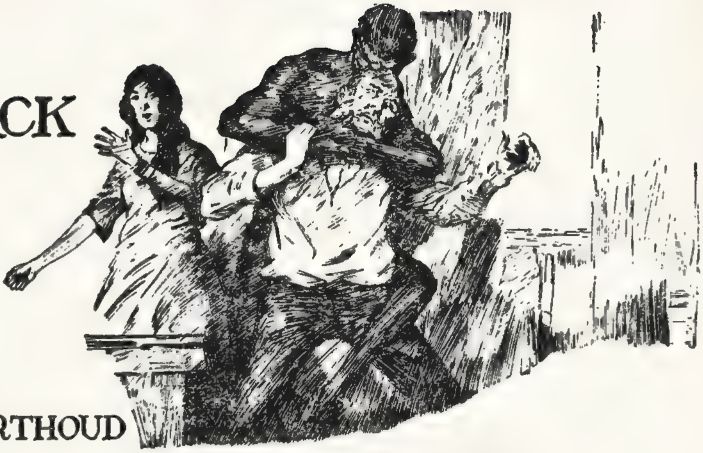
"Rodman! Old shipmate!" he cried, throwing his arms about the swaying figure.

"Taps—lights out—for the good o' the service," gasped New York Roddy with a feeble smile.

The detective lowered the limp form gently to the floor. Rodman's glazing eyes flickered. His lower jaw trembled in a queer way. His final whisper was very faint. The detective's straining ears could just catch it——

"Told you—ev'rybody likes—a gunman——"

THE THROWBACK



A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

by

FERDINAND BERTHOUD

Author of "The Unholy One," "Lone Hand," etc.

"SEEMS funny, doesn't it, Charlie?" the "Kid" suddenly broke out. "Here in this advanced year of 1920 we fool ourselves we're on the verge of being able to talk to Mars millions and millions of miles away, yet we're not even clever enough to tell a thing about the origin of these ruins right here around us."

"Nothing funny to my way of thinking, Tim," Charlie Maddocks dissented disinterestedly. "In this land of untold mysteries a little matter like that is nothing. Old Africa has always been jealous of her secrets anyway."

"Yes, but hundreds of ruined towns, Charlie, and not one giving a single atom of information."

"Who wants it, Tim? It's too blooming hot to worry about ancient history in any case."

Perspiringly Charlie reached under the counter. The trading-store was like an oven. Unerringly his hand went beneath the cold, wet blankets and touched a bottle. Wearily he produced the bottle and held it appraisingly at the level of his eyes.

"Let's have a drink, Tim. Liquor's a darned sight more important than ruins on a day like this."

The drink went down and Charlie and Tim stood side by side and looked out over the lower half of the door at the parched and sizzling country. No rain for ten months and where the grass had not already burned itself off it stood stark and brown and dry. Not a leaf stirred. Even the lizards and tarantulas were too lazy to show themselves. But for the hum and buzz of the insects and the rasping sound of the borers in the wood of the store the country was lifeless.

"No wonder we don't do any business," Charlie remarked listlessly. "Any Kafir who'd carry a load of mealies to trade in this heat must be pretty hard up for whatever he wants. So I've got to go to 'em. Load up and take a jaunt out in a day or so. That's all."

"Take out the wagon, eh? Going to take oxen or mules?"

"Oxen. Mules'll eat up all the grain I get in trade before I get back again."

"Going to take Piet?"

"Yes, Piet. One Cape-boy and one Kafir'll be enough."

"And you'll want beads and limbo mostly?"

"Yes, beads and limbo. Must take some stuff for the little *intombis* to make their little skirts. And tobacco and copper wire. A bit of salt, too, I think."

"May as well start getting it together now, Charlie. Do it by degrees; then we won't be tired and it'll be only a matter of loading up."

Mechanically Charlie reached under the counter again and produced the cold, yet sweating bottle. "Better get up a little more steam before we begin," he said.

The work began heartily, then went slower and slower. The sun passed overhead and commenced throwing shadows to the east. And Charlie, sitting on a pile of sacks, dropped calmly off to sleep. For a few minutes the Kid watched him. Then example was too strong. His arms went above his head, his mouth opened in a drowsy yawn. Limply he stretched himself across a pile of beer and whisky-cases. And he, too, slept.

"*Sacca bona, M'Lungu,*" came sharply from the half-open doorway.

In an instant Charlie and the Kid were on their feet and painfully opening their dry eyes. "*Sacca bona, madoda.*"

"Eh, eh," a mouth in a grinning face sent back.

The Kid was the first to come to himself properly. "*Ou funani?*" he inquired pleasantly. "What d'you want?"

"*Funa gutenga, M'Lungu.* I want to buy."

The sun was behind the head peering over the lower half of the door, but the gleaming rows of teeth plainly showed them that the grin was still on the shadowy face. The eyes of the two men, now cleared, stared fixedly at the face. The eyes rose slowly to the top of the head. Then the two pairs of eyes came away and stared one into the other. Charlie was laughing.

"First black Irishman I ever saw, Tim."

The Kid's cheeks went red. "He is a bit Irish, isn't he?" he said haltingly.

"Of course he's Irish. No man with that shock of red hair could be anything but Irish, no matter how black he may be."

"Well, if he's Irish he's all right. Let's let him in."

The red head, not understanding, yet seemed to understand. "*Yehbo, M'Lungu,*" he agreed, and the grin came near to cutting his face in two.

Lazily the Kid walked round the rough counter and slipped the bolt in the half door. With a succession of "*A-a-ahs,*" of pleasure the Kafir stepped in. And the door stayed open.

"——!"

Instantly the Kid's eyes turned from the flaring red head and came round to his pal. The sharp, puzzled exclamation sounded almost like a shot.

"——!" Charlie fairly shouted again. And as he shouted he pointed down to the ground.

Hesitatingly the Kid backed away—backed the full length of the counter.

"——!" he joined in. Then he added more thoughtfully. "Lord, Charlie, if only old Barnum were alive!"

In a second Charlie was round the counter and together the two men stood in silent contemplation, silent admiration. And the happy grin never once left the Kafir's face.

The two pairs of eyes rose to the level of those of the Kafir. "Where in blazes d'you get those feet from, Rooikop?" Charlie asked queerly.

Laughingly the Kafir lifted a foot high in the air in the direction of the whites and flexed the toes like a bird of prey gripping at its kill. And as if in fear of some unknown horror each man stepped quickly back. Each man felt a kind of funny sensation in his stomach.

For both feet were split far up and had only two crooked great toes apiece.

SHAKILY Charlie went round to the back of the counter and felt for the bottle. Just as shakily he poured out a couple of stiff jolts.

"Here, Tim. It's only a malformation—a kind of a monstrosity. But the combination of that and the red hair gave me a bit of a scrick for a moment or so."

Gradually Charlie broke into a rasping laugh. His hand reached for a third glass.

"Here, Rooikop. I know it's against the law, but here's a drink for you. Any man who has to put up with that head and those feet deserves all the sympathy he can get."

Willingly Charlie held out the glass with its huge dose. Coaxingly he reached it over to the still smiling Kafir.

"That'll do you good, Rooikop. Help to make you forget your ugly self."

But as if understanding "ugly self" the Kafir's hand went up in fierce refusal and his face turned hard and cruel and old.

"*Ikona, M'Lungu. Ikona. Ifuna.*"

"Don't want it?" Charlie fairly screamed as he almost dropped the glass in his utter amazement. "Don't want it? You're not human. You're the first Kafir I've ever seen who refused a drink. Timmie," he said turning, "I'll take it all back. This fellow's no Irishman. He refuses duty."

The Kid looked serious.

"There's something wrong with him, right enough, Charlie. That's far too much to be natural. Red hair, cloven feet and he won't drink. He's mad."

Quickly the Kafir recovered himself and the smile came back. Ingratiatingly he moved closer to the counter.

"*Funa gutenga, M'Lungu,*" he said quietly.

"Oh, *ja*. That's more like it. I was forgetting that part," Charlie admitted. "What d'you want to buy?"

The Kafir pointed.

"*Limbo, M'Lungu.*"

Then his hand indicated farther along the shelves. "And brass wire and copper wire and beads."

Leisurely Charlie reached down the things required.

"What do you want with limbo and wire, Rooikop? You haven't got any girl. No girl'd have you," he said in English.

As if comprehending perfectly the native looked him straight in the eyes.

"Oh, yes, I have, *M'Lungu*," he answered in Kafir.

For several minutes the Kafir pawed over the different bolts of limbo and eventually decided to take rather large pieces from two or three patterns. After which he picked out several coils of wire and a quantity of beads.

"Going strong," each white man thought to himself.

Slowly the Kafir piled the things he'd chosen together, then once more his eyes roved along the shelves. Suddenly they brightened up — lighted up and gleamed.

"I want that, *M'Lungu*."

Laughing, Charlie reached behind him and produced the article pointed out.

"You can't have that, Rooikop. I wouldn't sell that meerschaum for a hundred pounds. It's taken me years to color that pipe."

"Let me look at it, *M'Lungu*," the Kafir pleaded.

Dubiously Charlie handed it over.

"Be careful, Rooikop."

Tenderly the Kafir handled the pipe and looked at it from every point of view. His face was a regular study of happiness. His fingers seemed almost to caress the gray-brown carving.

"I'll give you more than a hundred pounds for it, *M'Lungu*," he suddenly shot out in his own language.

Charlie stood back with a jolt. "How the —— d'you know what I'm saying?" he asked.

But the Kafir was glum.

"Where's your money, anyway?"

For answer the Kafir unhesitatingly reached to his side and busily untied a large round ball of what appeared to be dirty rags from a belt. Confidently he slammed the ball of rags on the counter.

"*Nangu, M'Lungu.* There it is."

In deep wonderment Charlie and the Kid at the back of the counter closed in front of the Kafir. An arm-belt or a leg-belt or a waist-belt might contain money. A bundle of rags looked suspicious. But the Kafir, utterly ignoring them, was intent only on his own affairs. First one dirty rag came off and was laid aside, then another. After that another and another. And each individual rag was tightly knotted and with teeth and fingers had to be patiently unfastened.

"Whatever money he's got in there must be gold at least," Charlie surmised.

"Gold or very high value notes," the Kid agreed.

The ball of rags became smaller. And smaller and smaller. Came down to the size of a large hen egg. The last rag was removed.

"*Nangu, M'Lungu. Nangu male.* There's money," and the Kafir held up a piece of grayish crystal.

Dazedly Charlie looked round into the eyes of the Kid. His face twitched, his eyes twitched.

"Well, I'll be ——!" he said. "A trap! Trying to trap a fellow in as clumsy a way as that."

"What kind of a 'trap' d'you mean, Charlie?" the Kid asked innocently.

"Trap? Why, the beggar's come from Kimberley. And he's trying to sell me stolen diamonds."

At the word Kimberley the Kafir's eyes went wide open. His mouth went wide open. "*Ikona Kimblele.* Not Kimblele, *M'Lungu*," he protested indignantly.

"Where from, then?"

"*Lapa*," and the Kafir pointed vaguely away to the north and in the opposite direction to the diamond-mines.

Gingerly Charlie took the big diamond and carefully examined it. And as he examined it his eyes fairly bulged out and his lips went dry. For several minutes he turned it over and over, held it to the light, tapped it and endeavored to estimate its weight.

"It's a wonder—a beauty," he said enthusiastically. "It's worth anywhere from five to twenty-thousand pounds. I've worked in the Premier and I've worked on the Vaal River diggings and in the Somabula forest, but I've never seen so good-looking a stone as this."

The Kafir, watching him, was smiling contentedly and with great apparent satisfaction.

"Never saw one anything like it," Charlie went on. "In fact I think the thing's about as big as will find a ready market. I'll not say it's the biggest stone that's been found since old Tom Cullinan kicked up the Cullinan diamond at the Premier, for it's far from it. But it's as flawless as anything I've ever handled and a wonderful shape."

Abruptly Charlie turned to the Kafir again. "I'll give in," he said. "I don't think you're an I. D. B. trap after all. I don't think you know what Illicit Diamond Buying means, and I don't think this stone ever came from Kimberley. It's far too big for anybody to manage to steal—particularly a Kafir. I wonder who found it."

Still as if easily following the conversation and almost as if divining the white man's thoughts the Kafir pointed to himself.

"I found it, *M'Lungu.* I have found many."

"Where?"

And again the vague wave of the arm to the north. "*Lapa.*"

The Kafir, without any pretense at bartering, had already spread one of the pieces of limbo on the counter and was busily arranging the other pieces and the wire and beads inside it. To him the business appeared to be over.

"Will you bring the other diamonds to me and sell them?" Charlie asked.

Gravely the Kafir shook his head.

"*Ikona, M'Lungu.*"

"How much do you want for this one?"

The Kafir's hand was on the pipe and again caressing it affectionately. Without speaking he picked it up and slipped it under the knots in the package he had made.

"Then it's 'Good by, old pipe,' " Charlie said whimsically and half-sorrowfully.

Next moment the Kafir had passed through the doorway and was trotting swiftly northward.

"I THINK we'll outspan here, Piet. It looks as though wagons had outspanned here before. But long ago."

"*Ja, baas.* Uitspan. Old, old uitspan."

"Hang it. I wish I'd brought tinned vegetables with me," Charlie broke out at an angle.

"I wish I'd brought some tinned vegetables with me," he repeated. "Here we've been out two whole weeks now and never a vegetable."

"*Ja, baas,*" the Cape-boy agreed again. "In the Cape plenty wild spinach. Plenty wild 'sparagus. Way up here nothing. Meat, meat, plenty meat. That all."

"Gives a fellow *veld* sores. I was a fool to forget vegetables."

The sun was an hour up and the Cape-boy ordered the Kafir with him to get wood and start a fire for breakfast.

"I'll take a walk while you're cooking, Piet. I may get a shot at something," Charlie said. "More meat."

"*Ja, baas.* Guinea fowl—*korhaan* round here."

For a mile or more he walked directly away from the old tracks. Soon the grass grew higher and thicker. Short scrub and bush began closing in in all directions.

"Better get out of this," Charlie thought to himself. "Getting too thick. Don't know what I may run into and I've only got a shotgun."

Almost unconsciously he turned sidewise and walked along skirting the denser bush.

Straight ahead, but a couple of hundred yards away, a low bush with red spots on it suddenly became visible. Just as unconsciously he aimed for it. Thinking and yet not thinking he knew that anything red was unusual and needed investigating. In a few minutes he was up to it. Then for a while he stood utterly dumfounded.

"Tomatoes?" he said incredulously. "Wild tomatoes? Some poor devil must have had a camp here years ago and planted tomatoes and they've been propagating themselves ever since."

Eagerly he reached and plucked some of the undersized tomatoes and ate them. As a man starving for fruit or vegetables he gulped them down.

"Not going to leave many of those," he soliloquized.

Quickly he ate all he could without nauseating himself. Then he eagerly set to work to collect what remained in his hat to take back to camp. In a few minutes all within easy reach had been picked. Thoughtfully Charlie stood off and, stooping, looked through the bottoms of the plants. Several good-sized tomatoes were plainly visible deep below the leaves.

Putting the hat down he moved back to the plants and stepped into them. Carefully he put out his hands and pushed them aside. Next second, with a yelp, he was outside the plants again and standing with perspiration oozing out of him.

"Poor beggar," he was saying loudly. "I'll bet he was lost and found this patch of tomatoes and gorged and died by them. ——! But he gave me a scare."

Gradually control came back and he entered the plants again and trod them down. There in the middle of them was a skeleton —the remains of a skeleton—which may have been there for years. Not a sign of clothing or boots or anything to identify it. The white ants would have eaten the clothes the very first day it was there in any case, but the bones had fallen apart and many of them were half-buried in the sand.

"Poor beggar," Charlie said again as he trod and kicked more of the bush and roots away. "Can't even tell if he was a white man or a Kafir."

A faint clink as of something harder striking against his foot made him hesitate. Stooping, he scratched the sand from where his foot had struck. The top of a tin box such as would contain mustard or be used to keep salt dry came into view. Curiously Charlie pulled it out and pried off the rusted lid. Nervously his fingers reached in and pulled out the contents.

"Well, I'll be eternally hanged," he exclaimed sadly as he picked up his gun and tomatoes. "He was white right enough, poor devil. There'll be some queer reading for me in camp this breakfast-time."

SEATED on the disselboom of the wagon Charlie opened the tin once more. Inside was a small, faded book; beneath the book a little ball of rags.

Curiously he opened the book and hunted for any name or sign of identity. Many of the pages were covered with iron mold, some were torn, others were rotted away. But most of them were in good enough condition to make out the gist of what was written on them.

The entries were in pencil and mostly very much abbreviated, though in almost all cases understandable. The first entry had been made fifteen years before; the last was in March, fourteen years back. Wonderingly Charlie commenced deciphering them from beginning to end.

Troubles in the old country, immigrating to Africa, coming up-country, wife dying and his having to bury her, then details of the last days of his life.

> 1906 Mar: 7. Queer thing today. Strange Kafir came wagon. Wanted buy clothes belonging wife. Ribbons belonging Mary. Refused. Kafir offered tremendous diamond. Let him have several pieces useless finery. Kafir had red hair and two toes on each foot. Freak. Wish dear Nell had lasted till now. Diamond would have settled all our troubles. Too late now. Must go on another hundred miles or so, then make home for Mary. She was three yesterday.
>
> Mar: 10. Came to another of the many ancient ruins. Whole town. High round tower in center. Stone. Figure carved high on wall inside man two toes each foot. Kafirs say ancient burial-place. Haunted. Afraid to go in. Superstitious fools! Shall hack off carving tomorrow take as curio. Going dig and investigate.

And there the diary ended abruptly.

In deep thought Charlie looked away to the horizon and attempted to reconstruct the happenings in his mind. To him it was all almost as clear as if he were watching it, but the sudden ending puzzled him. And the incident of the two-toed Kafir made him uneasy. Jumpily he came back to the tin and searched in it for the little bundle of rags. Just as in his own case the bundle was knotted rag inside rag.

Nervously he untied each rag and laid it aside. Four or five wrappings and he came to the end. Clearly he could feel the hard surface of some object as he unfastened the remaining rag. The last rag was opened. Inside was a diamond almost identical with his own.

With instant misgiving—with a sudden feeling that he had been for once cleverly fooled—Charlie opened his shirt and took off a belt. With fingers shaking like leaves in a wind he took a small bundle from a pocket in it and unbound the rags from round his own stone. The glorious diamond was there just the same as when he had wrapped it up. As real and pure a diamond as ever African volcano spewed up.

"I'M GOING to stay here a day or so, Piet, and look this over. Hang trading for the time being. I don't feel like it."

For half a mile or more the wagon had threaded its way through broken, scattered stone walls of an ancient ruined town.

Now within fifty yards of the foot of a battered round tower Charlie had given instructions to outspan.

"Must be nearly forty miles back to where we left the patch of tomatoes, eh, Piet?" he remarked.

"*Ja, baas,* two day journey. We take three."

Curiously and inquisitively the white man wandered off among the ruins. At first he dodged round high walls and scrambled over fallen walls, noting all the time that most of them had originally been of the crudest construction. Also that they appeared to have been built without any particular plan or system.

Then at the foot of the tower he hesitated. The tower was still fifty or sixty feet high, though the top was crumbled away. And still on the walls were patches of fancy stone-work quite different from and far superior to any of the rough, uncut wall lying wrecked in all directions.

Scrambling over piles of débris and through tangled masses of roots and rotting wood he reached the entrance to the tower; an entrance which had once been arched but now was filled with heaps of fallen stones. And over this loose stone he carefully picked his way.

Fairly inside the tower he halted and looked round him curiously. Looked and listened for any signs of danger. Golden-tailed and red-tailed lizards scurried back and forth catching flies in the sun on the walls and on the masses of tumbled rock. Twice snakes wriggled away close to him as he had disturbed the particular stones under which they were hiding. And as he stood the sounds of creeping things in a dozen directions smote his ear.

Wonderingly he moved slowly on, picking his foothold more thoughtfully. The tower apparently twisted twice round like the commencement of a maze; like the inside of a conch-shell. A network of thick spiders' webs—webs which stuck to the clothes like glue and which were almost as strong as thread—ran from wall to wall till they seemed to form a dark curtain. None could have passed there for an age.

With a stick he slashed down the netting of webs as he moved forward, but the webs stuck and immediately formed into a ragged strip, like a war-tattered flag. Stick after stick he used and threw away. For a full quarter of an hour he pushed on and twisted round, then the wall on his right ended in a straight vertical line and he knew that he had reached the center of the building.

The masses of débris there were still greater than in the surrounding corridors. The tower must have originally been much higher than he had imagined. And through the crevices between the fallen rocks trees had forced their way up and made it impossible to stand far enough away to look to the top of the walls.

With great difficulty he worked his way round close under the walls and through the branches and few leaves of the trees tried to find the carving the diary had spoken of. But the roughness of the walls stopped any chance of seeing anything from below. The only way was to climb the stanchest tree and make his observations from aloft.

And there at once he saw it. The face was chipped and made more hideous, the body was marked with holes and cracks, the arms were worn and had half-dropped away. But the feet—as if preserved by some peculiar means—the feet were perfect.

Each foot possessed only two big toes.

With a sickening sensation, a sinking feeling in his stomach, the white man jumpily hastened to the ground and hurried out. Though sweating his head felt cold and clammy. For a moment in the open sunshine he trembled, then broke into a self-assuring forced laugh.

"Tomorrow," he said to his Cape-boy as he arrived back at his wagon, "I'm going to get that carving down. And I'm going to see what's lying under that pile of stones."

"What carving, *mij baas?*"

"The same carving that that dead man saw fourteen years ago."

But the Cape-boy's yellow face turned a dirty gray and he simply slowly shook his head.

A HYENA laughed far away in the distance and the shrill cry of a night-bird seemed to mock back at him. Somewhere up in the labyrinth of shattered walls an owl hooted. A mile to the west the fireflies flitted and danced over a water-hole in the dry river and the bull-frogs croaked and barked. Occasionally a faint splash told that something in the water was still hungry and busy on a hunt. It was night. The weird, weird African night.

Charlie, with his knees bunched and his

arms clasped round them, sat and looked into the blazing fire. Beneath the wagon the Cape-boy lay and snored his loudest; on the far side the fire the Kafir slept bundled in his blankets and all the noise in Christendom would not have worried him.

Dreamily Charlie gazed into the flames and thought over the day's happenings, over the happenings of the past few weeks. And in his mind he tried to piece them in with the happenings of years before. Africa, the land of so many strange things. Strange things which always were explainable, yet unexplainable. Drowsily he struggled to throw his mind back a thousand years, hazily he tried to force it forward a hundred.

The flames flickered, died. Nothing but a pile of glowing ashes remained. And they were fitfully blackening. Wearily. Charlie's eyes closed and he drew the first few breaths of sleep.

"*Eh, e-e-eh,*" a voice in dreamland seemed to say—a voice he somehow knew. Half-consciously the white man raised his eyelids.

"*Eh, e-e-eh.*" The voice more clearly came again.

Thoroughly awake the white man sat bolt upright and looked around.

"*Sacca bona, baas. Sacca bona, M'Lungu,*" distinctly sounded from somewhere close beside the sleeping Kafir.

Shakily Charlie threw on a handful of dry wood and the flames shot up again.

"*Sacca bona, M'Lungu,*" the voice said softly.

"*Sacca bona,* me foot. What the —— are you doing here?" the white man asked, a horrible sensation seeming to grip him by the throat and to clog his tongue.

The two-toed Kafir stood closer to the fire, the flames playing on him making him look like a bronze statue. Innocently as a little child he looked straight at the white man, a simple smile throwing lines of light and shadow across his curious face.

"I have come to help the white man. The white man was good to me."

'How in blazes can you help, Rooikop? You can't help me trading."

"I am not going to help the *M'Lungu* trade. When I have helped the *M'Lungu* he will never trade again."

For an instant a suspicious twinge shot itself through the white man's system, but the friendly smile on the Kafir's face quickly wiped it out and reassured him. Gradually he feltl more at ease and he also smiled.

"Something wonderful, eh, Rooikop? Some special good turn for me. Going to make my fortune, eh?"

"The *M'Lungu* speaks truly," the Kafir said very seriously. "If he will come with me I will show him where I get the diamonds."

Again the white man was suspicious, but his anxiety overcame it. "All right. Tomorrow I will come with you."

The Kafir lowered himself to his haunches and his eyes were level with the other's. "The *M'Lungu* must come tonight. Tomorrow may be too late," he said decisively.

"Why too late? What difference does a day make, Rooikop?"

"Tomorrow the diamonds may be gone. Others may get them."

For a while the white man sat silent. Then he slowly rose to his feet and stretched his arms and yawned.

"I'll come with you in the morning," he said. "I'm too tired tonight."

Stiffly the Kafir also rose. Once more his eyes were on a level with those of the man opposite.

"The *M'Lungu* must come," he urged in a harsh whisper.

Instantly the white man was flaming hot and angry.

"Who the —— are you to tell me what I must or must not do?" he shouted as he walked round to the native. "If you don't clear out and leave me alone till daylight I'll get a sjambok and half murder you."

Undaunted the Kafir stood his ground. "If the *M'Lungu* does not come with me tonight he will never come. Tomorrow I shall be very far away."

The white man halted and stared at the fire as if for inspiration.

"How much of a walk is it? Whereabout in the ruins are the things hidden?"

The Kafir's face clouded. "They are not in the ruins, *M'Lungu.* Nothing has been hidden in those ruins since the earth was young. The diamonds are far from here. A full night's walk."

"To blazes with it. Wait till morning."

"Bring a rifle, *M'Lungu.* Let us start."

With halting steps Maddocks walked to the wagon. A moment later, with rifle under his arm, he dropped in behind the Kafir and headed off into the darkness.

Hour after hour the Kafir padded along ahead without comment. Once or twice the white man had asked him how much further, but had been put off simply with "*Lapa.* There," and a vague sweep of the arm. The open country turned to bush, the bush to scrub, and now for more than an hour they had been passing through a mixture of reeds and scrub almost shoulder-high. In a couple of hours it would be daylight.

"How much farther, Rooikop? You didn't tell me the diamonds were in a river—that it was a matter of river-diggings. And these reeds tell me that I'm approaching big water."

"Patience, *M'Lungu.* Before the sun rises we shall be there."

"We must have come much more then twenty miles, Rooikop. We ought to have brought food."

"I know not what miles mean, *M'Lungu.* I know only time. And soon our journey will end. The *M'Lungu* can shoot then if he wishes to eat."

Again in absolute silence they hurried on. The reeds became thicker and thicker—became in places almost impassible—but they pushed through and steered straight ahead. The country seemed to be a huge sea of reeds and nothing more. Reeds all the same height.

The first rays of dawn were faintly shooting into the sky. Curiously the white man strained his eyes to view the scene around him. Through the gloom a gray desert of reeds. Reeds and nothing more.

The edge of the sun touched the horizon, the full sun shot up into the sky. In every direction a waste of reeds without a single sign of any landmark.

"Where's this diamond ground?" the white man at last said irritably. "I don't feel like going any farther. I'm so tired I can almost sleep standing."

"Just a little while more, *M'Lungu.* Just until the sun is up so high," and he indicated with his hand.

"Hang the old sun. I'm going to rest."

"No, *M'Lungu.* Rest when we get there. It is not far now."

Limply, helplessly the white man sank to the ground. "Blast the darned old diamonds and every two-toed Kafir unhung. I'm not going another step until I've had a few minutes' rest. I'm not going to kill myself."

The Kafir stood a few feet away and looked down apparently despairingly. The white man looked back up at him and grinned a grin of weary yet dogged determination.

"Going to have a snooze," he said half-stupidly.

THE stars were shining brightly; a faint new moon was directly above him. Half-consciously Charlie opened his eyes. Frogs croaked loud and hoarse in all directions and away in the clear night air he heard an iguana dragging its heavy body over flat rocks. Fireflies in myriads rocked and danced, mosquitoes sang their hateful song all round him. From far, far off—miles and miles away—the dull rumble of a lion roaring rolled and rolled until it reached him.

His eyes closed again and with difficulty he tried to collect himself. The breeze was cold; frostily, unpleasantly cold.

Presently his eyes reopened and he rose painfully to his knees and looked toward where the Kafir had last been standing. Painfully he crawled over to the place. No sign of a living thing. With cracked, dry voice he shouted a plaintive, piping shout. Not even an echo. With a dull, numbing shock it slowly entered his head that he was alone. Utterly alone. Alone he knew not where.

The reeds were above his head. Licking his parched lips greedily he raised himself unsteadily to his feet. Bush, bush, bush, scrub and reeds as far as the eye in the dim light could penetrate.

Nothing but scrub, scrub and bush. Scrub and scrub and reeds. For a moment his weary, dazed eyes blearily surveyed the scene, his brain, pounding and crazed from a day's sleep in the fierce sun, struggled to fix and focus itself in thought. His legs felt strangely, unnaturally weak. Felt as though not his own. His weakened legs twisted, his body wilted and he collapsed insensible.

The sun was hot, blazing hot in the sky. For hours it had blazed. Charlie stirred uneasily but didn't appear to awaken. Ants beneath him bit him but still his enfeebled brain stayed dead. And so for hours he lay.

Well on in the afternoon connected thought fought to return. Gradually it won. Slowly Charlie came to his senses. And his first thought was thirst.

Fierce, burning, wracking, torturing

thirst. He tried to lick his lips. There was no moisture on his tongue. Frantically he licked them again and blood came. Gratefully he swallowed his own blood.

With difficulty he staggered to his feet, then almost fell headlong into the bush in front of him. Steadying himself he slowly stooped and reached down for his rifle, then carefully balanced himself with it.

And all the time his brain called wordlessly for water, water, water.

Gradually the brain collected itself; gradually it formed coherent thought. He must find water, find his wagon. Get back to his wagon at once. Surely it couldn't be more than twenty miles, thirty at most, away.

With tottering footsteps he started and broke through the fence of reeds and bush in front of him. And swaying and reeling like a man stricken and about to die he made his way in the direction of his wagon.

The day wore on and still more bush. Bush and reeds, reeds and bush. Never a tree or sign of a tree, just bush and reeds as high as his shoulders. Reeds from the overflow of a tropical river which in the rainy season cast its waters fifty miles beyond each bank. The stream itself might be anywhere. A little trickle. Perhaps only a broken line of steaming water-holes.

Red-tailed and blue-tailed and golden-tailed lizards scurried across his path in sudden terror, snakes slid noiselessly away, occasionally a sugar-bird flitted like a fluttering jewel past him. And always, always, always the insistent, shrill screech of the insects.

Two full hours he walked with fear, blind, perishing fear, entering deeper and deeper into his soul. He looked at the sun. In one more hour it would be night. Bush, bush, bush and no wagon.

In crazy horror he tried to run. His legs refused to move faster: his brain no longer had control of them.

Half an hour till night. Suddenly the dry face broke into a smile. The ground was beginning to appear familiar. Again he tried to force a run. Again he failed. Oh, for a sight of the wagon, for the sight of a human being, for the sight of that round tower! He tried to shout, but his voice refused to act. He tried to speak to himself for company. Never a sound.

The sun was dipping. He was sure now he knew where he was.

The sun sank and as it sank he saw footmarks. His heart pounded and his brain burned as he followed them. Night came.

He was back exactly where he had started from.

When next he awakened the sun was again above him. Blazing, blazing like a ball of molten steel. The sand around him burned like fire, everywhere above the reeds rose a shimmering haze—the dread miasma.

His brain was on fire, his body on fire, his legs and arms peeling from heat. And thirst! His tongue refused to move. Savagely he tried to open his mouth and lick his lips. His lips were fastened together. Heedless of pain he forced them open with his fingers and blood dribbled down his chin and on to his chest.

With an effort he struggled to his feet and leaned on his rifle. Bush, bush, bush. Reeds, reeds, reeds. Clear to the horizon in each direction a desert of scrub. Not a tree or hill. Not a sign of human life. Desolation!

With such care as he could command he searchingly examined the place where he had started out the day before, then looked for the place where he had come in. And taking the rifle, which now seemed worse than red-hot, he walked out at an angle from his previous tracks.

Again the red lizards, the golden lizards and the blue lizards, holding their tails high in the air, scuttered away; scorpions, holding their tails over their backs, hurried under rocks and snakes unconcernedly inspected him and wriggled aside. Tarantulas ambled away crab fashion and centipedes walked serenely off, each line of legs moving like troops on a march.

But he saw none of them. His aching, half-closed eyes stared straight to the horizon. All else was of no earthly interest to him.

For hours he staggered along, the tortured muscles and bones in his legs insistently telegraphing pain to his tortured brain. And thirst, thirst, thirst shrieking itself unendingly, unceasingly.

The sun passed over his head and slowly commenced the second half of daylight. Water, water, water! If he could but see a small buck, a small pig, anything, and kill it he'd even drink its blood.

A small duyker doe got up a few yards ahead of him, started to trot away, then stopped and with startled, inquisitive eyes looked innocently at him. With all the steadiness he could command he fired at it. The deer fell.

With eager footsteps he hurried his fastest to it, knelt and cut its throat. The warm blood spurted out, spurted over his hands. In horror, sickening, deadly horror, he rose shakily and stumbled thirstily away.

The sun was sinking. At last he was back on familiar ground. At last he found footmarks. Straining his ears he listened intently for the sound of human voices. Listened and listened. And as he listened he hurried crouchingly, despairingly, fearing to lose the footmarks ere the sun went down.

The sun dipped and the tropic night commenced to fall. His dull eyes brightened, his pulse quickened. More footmarks, a second lot. Surely he must be close to salvation.

Next moment he sagged, sank senseless to the ground. Senseless where he had slept the night before.

THE sun was not yet up when wakefulness returned. The heavy dew of night had settled on him and frozen and he was distressingly cold. Cold all but his head. His head was throbbing, bounding and throbbing again.

He put up his hands to press it. His hands fell listlessly back and bumped into the sand. His mouth was gone and in its place was a furnace. A scorching, roaring furnace. Fiercely he reached his lips, relentlessly he ripped them apart, and when the blood reached his tongue and moistened it he licked and licked and sucked at them.

With an effort he rose to a sitting position. The sun leaped into the sky. The clothes on his body steamed and dried. And as they dried he picked at them—picked at himself like a caged monkey.

By degrees with the aid of his rifle he levered himself to his feet. His bones cracked, his muscles cracked. The rifle burned him and he looked at it queerly.

Bush, bush, bush. Reeds, reeds, scrub. A desert of green and gray clean away to the sky-line. For a moment—a moment only—he saw it all with the eyes of a human being.

His brain, his body, his heart, his very soul shouted for water. Water, water, water. Water he had to have.

Blindly, without any attempt at reasoning, he ventured off into the bush without any earthly thought of direction. For a hundred years or so he rocked along.

Water, water, water. Water, water or death. At the end of the hundred yards he stopped suddenly, stood looking inanely, stupidly at his rifle. It burned his hands. Mystified he looked at one hand. Blistered! Crazily he looked at the other hand. Blistered! With a snarl he lifted the rifle and with all his remaining strength cast it away into the scrub.

A few yards farther and the knowledge that his boots hurt him oozed into his fluttering thoughts. Three days and nights he had them on and only now discovered they pained him. Sitting he took them off and threw them from him. His socks followed.

The sun scorched till he felt like cracking. His walk grew slower. The clothes on his back scratched him and cut his dry skin. Water, water, water. His body was shriveling up.

The scratching continued. It seemed his shirt was flaming.

Dully he stopped, his dull eyes fixed on the horizon. Bush, bush, bush. Reeds, reeds and scrub. Dully he turned completely round and looked in all directions. Bush, bush, bush. Reeds, reeds and scrub everywhere.

With a frothing curse he tore madly at his shirt. Tore, struggled and ripped at it. With an oath he flung it away. Away went his hat. Then cursing, howling and crying bitterly he tore piece by piece every stitch of clothing from his body. Everything but his waist-belt. And but for that Charlie Maddocks stood as naked as Adam.

For an instant he stood and thumped his chest loudly with his clenched fists. For one last instant he looked humanly, hungrily, longingly at the sky-line.

Then animal entered and man left.

With the strength of an animal he bounded into the bush. And shrieking, yelling, screaming, laughing, heedless of thorns or snakes, he tore his mad way through it.

BABIAAN, the gray-haired, wrinkled old chief, jogging along comfortably on his horse after visiting a *kraal* thirty miles away, dreamily looked across to a rocky hill, a *kopje,* a few hundred yards to his left.

"—— hot," he soliloquized in Kafir. "Looks a bit cooler under some of those trees over there. If I wasn't so close home—only another hour—I'd go over and rest a while."

He paused and searched himself for snuff. "I've half a mind I would go over," he continued musingly. "An hour one way or the other doesn't matter much."

With a pressure of his knee he turned his horse and aimed for the *kopje*, his eyes scanning its sides for the coolest spot.

"Hello!" he suddenly exclaimed. "What's that thing staring at me for? Fearfully big monkey, that."

Half-way up the hill a dirty, grizzled head surmounting a pair of red brown shoulders was visible. The eyes in the head stared fixedly, in hideous fear, straight at him.

"Can't be a monkey," he commented as he drew nearer. "Must be a Kafir. Kafir with a beard? That's funny. Can't be one of my people."

The strange thing darted from behind a rock and ran a distance up the hill, only to turn at a new vantage point and stare again.

"That's no Kafir," decided Babiaan. "It hasn't even got a loin-cloth on. And it's too big for a Bushman."

At the foot of the *kopje* Babiaan slid off his horse, let the halter-rope fall to the ground and started climbing.

As he climbed the thing above climbed farther from him. It came to an open space and dashed across it. Babiaan saw it fully.

Babiaan went back as he had come. Five minutes later he was galloping steadily in the direction of his *kraal* six miles away.

At the *kraal* at the end of a winding hill-path the old chief halted and shouted loudly. In droves men came from their huts and squatted silently around. In rapid Matabele Babiaan explained exactly what he wanted. The men went to the edge of the hill and shouted loudly. From all directions men who had been sitting in the fields, watching their wives working, hastily rose, hurried in and squatted expectantly about. Three hundred or more there were altogether.

"Which of you men is the best runner?" Babiaan inquired.

A lithe young man stepped up.

"Go at once for the white doctor at the Mission," the old chief said. "Hurry."

Without a word the Kafir turned and, waving his knobkerrie from side to side in front of him in the queer manner of the African runner, trotted quickly off.

Babiaan motioned. As one man the Kafirs rose and, falling in behind his horse, silently followed him.

The pace was great and in less than an hour the *kopje* was half a mile ahead. Babiaan stopped and held up his hand. The men stopped instantly. Sharply he spoke to the man nearest him. The man passed down the line giving instructions and the men divided into four parties.

The old chief slipped off his horse and sat on the ground. One portion of the men crouched in the grass and waited with him. Fifteen minutes later the men in charge of the divisions to right and left signaled to him that the crowd behind the *kopje*, which he couldn't see, was in position. At a sign from him all four divisions spread out into a complete circle and started steadily forward. The men came closer, gradually reached the foot of the *kopje*, closed in tighter and, as they rose higher and higher, formed a compact ring of sturdy humanity. Babiaan climbed slowly above them, peering carefully into every possible hiding-place.

The line of Kafirs came to a hole; a small cave under a rock. In the dim light two of the Kafirs entered. Next instant they lay on their backs and a frantic creature sprang past over them and dashed from rock to rock up the hill. A horde of Kafirs, agile as rabbits, chased after it.

The creature got to the top of the hill and made to descend the other side. A packed mass of Kafirs faced it. Desperately it turned to fight its way back through the crowd behind it. Twenty powerful hands firmly, but kindly, gripped it. Spitting, screaming, biting and kicking its hands were tied behind it. Spitting, screaming and biting its feet were tied together. Deftly it was rolled in a blanket and tied up.

And helpless as a new-born baby, trussed up like a bale of hay, Charlie Maddocks lay on the top of the hill and shrieked unintelligible vengeance to the startled skies above.

The sun had scarcely risen next morning before the doctor arrived. The Kafir had found him at midnight and he had ridden right through from then.

The doctor looked long and seriously at Charlie, who was now wide awake.

"Mind clean gone," he said sorrowfully. "Don't think he'll ever be right again. But first we'll feed him, then I'll give him something to put him to sleep again. I'll stay a couple of days. Fix up some blankets in a hut for me."

"Strange," the doctor continued meditatively; "the moment a man feels sure he is lost and feels his mind going he always tears off his clothes. After that, except by accident or strategy, he is never caught. Always fears his fellow men."

"Do you think he will always be dangerous, *Inkoos?*" Babiaan asked.

"Oh, dear, no," the doctor explained with certainty. "After a day or so he'll be resigned enough. But you'll have to break him in just like an animal. Break him in by patience and kindness. Keep him here until he becomes quiet. Then perhaps I can do something for him."

As if caring for a little god the Kafirs watched over the demented white man. His slightest wish, crazy though it might be, was instantly attended to. To them, in their superstitious way, a madman was something almost superhuman—almost holy. And a crazy white man was quite beyond anything in their experience.

But every wish was simply a motion of the hand, a look. His brain had seemed to have finished acting of itself altogether. And whenever food or anything was brought him his eyes looked to make hopeless inquiries of himself—to be searching inside him. It may have been the brown girl with the long hair who waited on him, perhaps some crackled memory.

Within a week all effort or intention to escape had entirely disappeared and Charlie was allowed to lie perfectly free. The food the natives provided for him on the doctor's orders—their much prized chickens and eggs and milk—had strengthened his worn-out body, and strengthening his body had pacified his mind.

And then one morning Babiaan, coming to the hut to see if his charge was awake, found him standing just inside the entrance looking longingly out into the distance. Whereupon trousers made of brayed goat-skins and a shirt of trade limbo, made by Babiaan's instructions while he lay helpless, were produced for him and he was carefully dressed and allowed out-of-doors. But it was quickly apparent that everything he did, dressing and all, was done monkey-fashion by imitation and not with human thought.

For weeks he wandered aimlessly about doing little jobs and attempting little kindnesses, but always in a crude, dazed, puzzled way. Time and again he attempted to be of assistance, even executed little childish courtesies for the brown woman who had waited on him, but plainly with evident wonder as to why he should do them or what they meant. And Babiaan, watching him sadly one day, shook his grizzled head and muttered to himself. For his aged wisdom knew that, but for a miracle, the white man was gone for ever.

"WILL the *M'Lungu* shoot?" the old chief asked one morning as he held out an old Martini rifle.

With a queer look as if fighting to get back a memory as to what was all wrong about it the white man reached for the rifle. A Kafir had no right to own firearms, but his errant brain quite failed to fix the thought. Smilingly he took the rifle and examined it, his eyes cleared and gleamed, then instantly they filled with hopeless tears.

The chief produced a packet of cartridges and handed them over.

"Go shoot, *M'Lungu.* The police will not touch a white man no matter how much he kills."

And at midday that day the demented Charlie came in and beckoned to several young fellows to bring their knives and follow him to help bring in his kill. And that day and every day and many days after the *kraal* feasted on fresh meat as it had never done before.

The girl with the long hair looked smilingly up into the face of the old chief.

"I think I'll go for a ride for a while, my father."

With genuine affection the old man smiled down at her.

"Will my daughter take the little gun?"

"No," she said. "I found a patch of wild fig-trees in the hills many moons ago. The figs should be ripe by now and I'm going to get some. That is if the baboons haven't taken them all," she added.

"Very well, my child," the old man agreed, confident in the thought that the girl could always take care of herself. "But you will not be long. And you will be careful." For a moment he hesitated and looked away. "After guarding you all these many years I can not lose you—now," he finished meaningly.

The girl laughed.

"It isn't I that has to be careful," she said.

Charlie, mutely listening, had noted that she had looked at him as if wanting him to go along, yet was afraid to ask. Mutely he fetched her saddleless horse and brought it to her, his wandering brain all the while wondering why he waited on a Kafir and why a Kafir had a horse.

Listlessly he picked up his rifle. Listlessly he shoved a cartridge into the breech and filled a pocket. Aimlessly and without the faintest plan he ambled slowly off in the direction girl and horse had taken.

In the glorious, clear, electric air the miles passed quickly. Almost before she thought of it the brown girl reached the hill which held her fig-trees. Nimbly she dropped to the ground, let the halter-rope hang, and hurried up the slope. Fig-trees galore. Not a fig.

"Hang those wretched baboons," she said in the only language she knew. "Here I've been getting my mouth ready for figs for weeks past and there isn't a fig left. The greedy brutes don't even wait for them to get ripe."

Pouting she went back down the hill and moodily mounted. Then started back through the long grass on the more level country.

A mile ahead the grass seemed moving irregularly over a space of a hundred yards or so.

"That's queer," the girl's mind told her. "Lots of life over there. Not buck or their horns would be showing above the grass. That needs investigating."

Heedless of being unarmed she looked at the cruel hippotamus-hide *sjambok* in her hand and headed her horse for the disturbance.

Whatever was in the grass had noticed her coming. The disturbance became greater and she could hear the rustling of it plainly as it was brushed aside.

"Not guinea fowl," she said contemplatively. "They'd make less noise and be more massed. Something bigger than that."

Next moment she came to the edge of the moving life and in pleased surprize saw what it was. A muddled, scuttering line of baboons straggled away before her. Big baboons, little baboons, old gray grandpa baboons, baby-in-arms baboons.

"You, eh?" she said, addressing them. "Now you're going to get it for taking my figs. You won't touch me on my horse so I'll just tickle you up a bit."

Merrily she cantered up to the nearest big baboon, who swung sidewise to avoid her, and lashed playfully at him. The baboon turned and bared his teeth.

"That'll freshen you up. Make you hurry. Won't it, dearie?" she laughed as she passed on to the next offender.

Then dodging to right and left she swerved, galloped and cantered clear along the crowd, lashing out in every direction at anything big enough to hit. At the end of the line she stopped and bringing her horse round facing a *kopje* in the near distance, started to walk him away.

"Had enough?" she pleasantly asked. "That ought to be enough of a lesson for this time. Don't suppose you'll need a secong helping, will you?"

As a parting shot she gave one final, all embracing slash of the *sjambok*. The end of the lash nicked a baby baboon. It cried out like a little child.

The brown girl came to the foot of the *kopje* close ahead, then turned to skirt it. As she turned a line of big man baboons sat motionless facing her a dozen feet away.

"What are you doing there, mischief?" she asked teasingly. "Looking for more trouble?" and she drove her horse at them. The baboons didn't move. The horse shivered and whined.

"Make way," she said and lashed at them viciously.

The baboons leaped aside, then instantly came back to their old positions and sat rigid. The long, gleaming teeth of each one were bare.

"Oh, well," the girl went on, still unafraid, "if you feel that way about it I suppose I can go round the other way."

Disdainfully she turned her horse and started in the opposite direction. Thirty feet away a solid line of baboons sat facing her immovably.

"You brutes are getting too neighborly," she said annoyed. "I'm just going to leave you, that's all," and she pulled her horse round the way she had come.

A compact line of angry man baboons faced her there, too, and her horse refused to charge them.

A half-circle of vicious animals around her, the steep, rocky hill behind.

Then, and only then, did fear enter her mind. Fear. Abject, hopeless, numbing fear.

The semi-circle of baboons narrowed. As it narrowed the horse backed closer to the *kopje*. The eyes of each baboon were fixed intently on the girl. A hundred, two hundred, three hundred sets of powerful teeth shone round her. The slightest move and the lips above and below the teeth yammered in sickly threat. One more lash of the whip and she would be torn to pieces.

The girl knew, knew in a dull yet positive way. Knew it absolutely. This was the end.

Closer and closer the ever-tightening line pressed round. Closer and closer the horse backed to the rocks. But for the footfalls silence. Utter silence. Once or twice a baboon coughed hoarsely. That was all.

The rocks were reached. The onpressing line, at first one deep, was two deep, now three deep. Impassible. The horse tried to climb backward, climbed a few feet and sat on its haunches. Mechanically the girl turned it half sidewise. Never once did her eyes leave the eyes of her beseigers.

The horse did better. Thirty, forty, fifty feet he climbed. And just out of striking distance the baboons still followed round.

"Now it will be," the girl said to herself. "Once well in the rocks and they'll surround us. The horse will go down and they'll tear me to shreds."

She shut her eyes.

For a full moment she kept them shut.

When she opened them again the horse was still climbing. They were half-way to the top and the baboons were still creeping along but, strangely, no nearer.

Anxiously she looked up the hill. None were above her.

She shut her eyes again. Her brain grew cold. Her heart almost ceased beating. Numbly, insensibly, hopelessly she clung tightly to her horse and waited.

IT WAS hot as all days were, and Charlie had come to the top of a rocky hill. On the very summit was a single leafy tree. Lazily Charlie lay beneath it and did what most men do so well—nothing.

In a bewildered sort of way he looked around and took in the scene. Below him the rock-strewn slope of the hill, a few yards of rocky valley; then another hill almost identical to the one on which he was, only far more precipitous and with a flatter top.

A klipspringer popped round a rock on the farther hill, leisurely looked at him then, springing lightly to the top of the rock, bounded to another rock twenty feet away and stood again to further inspect him.

Lying on his stomach Charlie put the rifle to his shoulder and took careful aim. "Two hundred yards," the dull brain signaled to him.

Quietly he put the rifle down.

"Too pretty to kill," his brain had told him.

And Charlie drowsed—drowsed happily.

The cough of a baboon came gruffly to him across the valley.

"Old man baboon calling," the animal brain noted.

The cough came gruffly once more, this time more of a bark. Several barks and snarls followed.

"Quarreling," his brain registered.

Still drowsing the half-dazed eyes looked uninterestedly at the top of the far hill. No baboons in sight.

The coughs came faster, then several loud, sharp barks.

"Vicious," his dull brain surmised.

The sound of the scraping of rocks hit the air, the hindquarters of a horse struggling half-backward rose above the flat summit of the hill; the remainder of the horse came into view.

The brown girl was on its back.

As if shot from a trap Charlie sprang to his feet. And as he got to his full height a deep half-ring of baboons came in sight steadily, remorselessly driving horse and rider to the sheer edge of the hill and the sharp rocks below.

Charlie dropped to his stomach.

"Two hundred yards," his dead brain had told him. And the rifle answered.

A baboon dropped instantly and the others turned and eyed him curiously. Then the half-ring moved relentlessly on. Again the rifle sounded. As fast as hand could load and draw trigger it sounded. And at each shot a baboon fell dead. Myriads remained. Still they pressed on.

His pocket was getting empty, but frantically he continued firing. And yet the mass, intently bent on hideous revenge, surged forward. The backing, shivering horse now squealed in helpless terror. The figure on its back remained motionless.

Hurriedly Charlie made a count in his pocket. Seven cartridges his flickering brain registered. Nervously he pushed them in one by one and carefully fired. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven shots. The hand went again to the pocket. It came out empty.

The squealing horse backed to the side of the hill, the mouthing, jibing baboons ten feet away all round him. Forced by those behind they were pushed bodily closer in. A baboon leaped forward and ripped at the horse's head, then jumped back. The horse screamed.

The edge of the flat rock crumbled behind it and the horse felt eagerly round for a firmer footing. It crumbled again. Excitedly the horse endeavored to change feet. The other hind-foot gave way. The horse screamed louder and struggled pitifully for safety. Gradually its hindquarters sank lower. The rock scraped its chest, its hind feet uselessly scraped the rock for a foothold. Then it collapsed. With one shrill, heartrending shriek it fell bodily. And falling threw the brown girl clear and sidewise from it.

Charlie was on his feet again, his dull eyes suddenly blazing. Impulsively he threw the useless rifle from him and, leaping recklessly from rock to rock, plunged wildly down the hill. Loudly he howled in furious animal rage and, howling, waved a huge black knobkerrie.

Howling he crossed the little valley and howling charged the opposite hill.

The girl's body had caught on a rock a dozen feet down and hung there limply. The horse, a shattered wreck, was fifty feet below. Baboons in droves were dropping from the level summit. Some already clustered round the unconscious girl, looking at her inquisitively. And Charlie, charging blindly up, was shrieking like a drunken fury.

Next moment he was in among the angry mob slashing fiercely in every direction with hunting-knife and knobkerrie. The space was small, and few baboons could reach him at one time, but as they fell killed or maimed others took their places.

And the fight, animal with animal, continued madly. A baboon caught him by the neck from behind. He slashed over his shoulder at the wrists and the muscles were cleanly severed. Falling it bit wildly at his legs, then rolled away.

The carcases around him cluttered at his feet until he hadn't room to keep his balance. And still he sent them screaming and tumbling down the steep rocks below. By luck the healthy life of late had made those arms like steel.

A frantic animal had gripped his shirt from behind. It tore and he slashed upward behind at it. As the knife came swiftly back a baboon fell on him from above. Next instant another had him firmly by the throat, its hideous face grimacing into his a scant six inches off.

And he went down.

The limp bodies at his feet slowly slipped. Struggling he slipped slowly with them. Then they fell straight. And with dead bodies under him and a heavy body above him, with hands still tearing at his neck, he went down helpless as a bag of sand.

A line of hunting Kafirs a mile long beating across the veld noticed a horse and rider moving sidewise silhouetted against the sky on top of a *kopje*. For a moment nothing more than wonder at a horse being on top of a rocky hill entered their minds.

A crouching animal came into the silhouette, then another, then an ever-thickening crowd of them. Some of the animals were on four feet, some on two, some squatted aside apparently waiting for something. Silently each Kafir looked at the man next him.

The line of Kafirs turned the corner of the *kopje* in a howling mass, their dogs rushing mouthing excitedly ahead of them. The baboons heard them, some farther up the hill saw them, and as they came within striking distance those animals not dead or hurt too badly hopped away from rock to rock, yammering and jabbering and showing their long teeth. Assegais and knobkerries thrown wildly fell away harmlessly as the baboons leaped easily aside.

The leader of the Kafirs reached the side of the unconscious white man. One quick, all-absorbing look at him.

"*Manzi.* Water," he said to the nearest Kafir.

Quickly he turned to another man close by.

"Run to the Mission Station for the doctor. Hurry for your life."

Kafirs had scrambled up the hill to the

girl and were carrying her gently down. Others had carefully raised the man and carried him to the shade of a tree. And beneath the tree the two lay motionless.

The leader of the Kafirs, kneeling by the side of the man and bathing his head, shook his own head sadly.

"*Feele sebele,*" he said mournfully. "He's very bad."

Blood poured from a fearfully ugly wound in the back of the scalp and on the forehead and neck were deep, long scratches where flesh was torn away.

"*Feele, sebele,*" the Kafir said quite hopelessly.

The Kafir turned the white man over to the men with him and stepped over to the girl. Though still unconscious she didn't appear to be bleeding much anywhere. For a few minutes he softly bathed her head, then felt her limbs and body for broken bones. But for the half-knee length Kafir shirt and her necklaces and bracelets she was quite nude. No bones apparently had cracked. But through the brown skin a huge, fast blackening space on her side where she had hit the rocks was getting more and more distinct.

Several of the Kafirs had taken off the monkey and leopard-skins which they were wearing and had fastened them together. These they had now tied to two poles to form *mechilas*. Into the *mechilas* they carefully lifted the two bodies. And sadly, almost reverently, they bore them back across the *veld* and up the steep hill into the *kraal* of Babiaan.

"A very bad concussion and terrible loss of blood," the doctor explained to the old chief. "It will be weeks before he is up again. But with his wonderful constitution and strength he'll pull through right enough. What glorious luck they missed his windpipe."

The girl had already regained her senses, but it would be days before she, too, would be herself again. For the moment she lay with shattered nerves and tortured body silently crying to herself.

"A few days' rest, a few nights' sleep," the doctor told the chief, "and she'll get over it. She's young yet and she isn't so fragile as these white women."

And a week later she was up.

Then like a devoted slave, a slave who owned, Charlie became her private property.

Day and night she waited on the unconscious man. Not a movement of a finger but she was there to investigate. And never a man or woman but the old chief could even enter the hut without her showing her teeth like a little animal. From some strange place she brought a pair of old trade-scissors, and with these, deftly as only a woman can, she'd cut his shoulder-long hair and trimmed his waving, straggling beard.

And at night, if she slept, she lay stretched across the entrance to the white man's hut.

SIX weeks passed; seven weeks. The first morning of the eighth broke. Sadly, as was his wont, old Babiaan made his way to see his patient. Long ago had he completely given up hope of ever seeing him about again.

Sadly the old man approached the entrance—came within a few feet of it. Then stood as one suddenly rooted to the spot.

"I'm going to get a horse and take you for a ride this morning," a laughing girl's voice was saying in Kafir.

And a weak, yet hearty, man's voice came back in Kafir.

"You'd better not try it, you little imp."

With an effort the old man regained himself, then with a glowing feeling in his heart he hobbled quickly inside. The brown girl, on one knee, was holding the white man up by the shoulders so that he could see outside, and the man, intensely puzzled, obviously was endeavoring to collect his thoughts and find out where he was.

Quickly the old man stepped to the pile of blankets on the floor.

"*Sacca bona, M'Lungu,*" he said happily.

The white man looked at him as at a perfect stranger.

"*Sacca bona, madoda,*" he greeted, but his eyes showed clearly the struggle to recognize his visitor.

"I am Babiaan," the old man explained. But the eyes only stared back uncomprehendingly.

Softly the girl smoothed out the makeshift pillows and placed them under the white man's head and shoulders, then silently but smiling a smile of secret satisfaction, she left the hut.

The old chief sat with his back to the wall and for several minutes looked steadily at the white man, his face glowing with extreme happiness. The white man raised a hand and gently stroked his forehead.

"The *M'Lungu* is getting well?" the old man queried.

"Perfectly well. The only trouble is I feel terribly stiff and as if some one had hit me on the head with a rock."

The old man laughed.

"It was your head hit the rock instead," he said.

"I must have been a fool, then."

Again the old man laughed.

"Fools do not hit rocks with their heads for the same reason you did."

The white man stared inquisitively.

"Shall I tell the *M'Lungu?* Is he strong enough?" the chief went on.

"Oh, yes. My head thumps a bit, but I think I can stand all you will tell me. If I find it too much I will say so."

"Then I will tell you from the beginning. It is a long story, *M'Lungu.*"

"All right. I am listening."

With great detail the old chief recounted every incident from the day when he first saw the face of Charlie peering at him in terror from behind the rocks on the side of the *kopje.* How they had caught him and fastened him down, how they had brought the doctor to him and how he had at last become docile and been allowed to go about freely and even go shooting. Then he told him of the girl on horseback and the fight with the baboons, how he had slashed in and bravely saved her, how they——

"Stop it," the white man broke in just there. "As I didn't know a single thing about it I don't see that I did anything to boast about," he objected.

But the old man merely smiled and went straight on. How they had brought the doctor again, how he had explained that the white man would never recover his senses again—at which the white man grinned sheepishly—how he had lain almost two whole moons without speaking or seeming to know even so much as that he was alive and how that morning the old man had come sorrowfully to see his white friend, only to have his sorrow suddenly turned to joy at finding him awakened from his long sleep.

"How long?" Charlie asked anxiously.

"It is nearly two moons since you were hurt, *M'Lungu,* and it is five moons since I first found you."

"Five months!" Charlie echoed. "Have I been out of the world all that time? And what happened to my wagon?"

"They tell me your wagon went back, *M'Lungu.* Your Cape-boy and Kafir waited many days. Then a Kafir told them that you were dead and they went away frightened. Some of my men hunting the *aardvark,* the ant-bear, by night saw the wagon, but before they came to tell me of it it was gone too far for me to trace it. Gone I know not where."

"Was it a Kafir with two toes who frightened them?" the white man queried.

"*Yehbo, M'Lungu.*"

The white man struggled weakly to fix his pillows so that he could raise himself higher. The old man, noticing, stepped over and fixed them for him. Then he sat back against the wall once more.

"A Kafir with red hair?" the white man queried again.

"With red hair, *M'Lungu.*"

For a while both men were silent. The white man's eyes, fixed on the grass of the roof, were struggling to piece together and see the past. Striving and struggling. His errant brain was still wont to wander. His eyes came down. Nervously he turned to the old chief.

"To what tribe does the brown girl belong? She is not of your tribe, my father."

With eager face the old man rose quickly to his feet and stood at the side of the white man.

"She is not of any tribe, *M'Lungu.* She is as white as the *M'Lungu.* As white as the *Makewa* himself."

"White?"

"*Yehbo, M'Lungu.* White. But I have had to dress her as the young girls of my own people, and in the many years she has lived among us the sun has burned her brown."

Again the wandering brain fought to get away and the white man struggled to hold it in leash. The old man, patiently waiting, went back to his place by the wall.

"Years?" the white man repeated weakly. "Why is she living with natives?"

"I found her, *M'Lungu,* just as I found you."

The old man held his hand out at the height of a toddling child.

"I found her many, many, many moons ago. Found her when her head reached no higher than this."

"Why didn't you try to find her people? To take her back?"

"*M'Lungu*, in those days the white settlers had not come into the country. There was no Mission. No Doctor. We had never seen a white child before. Now she is one of us."

The inside eyes of the white man went through the entrance to the hut and out to the brown girl with the long hair and the firm white teeth. His wavering brain was troubled.

"Where did you find her, father? How did you find her?"

The old man waved an arm.

"Away, away a long days' march from here we found her, *M'Lungu*. Away in the ruined city with the round tower. The city where you left your wagon."

Like a flash his brain came back and settled firmly.

"There?"

"*Yehbo, M'Lungu.* In an abandoned wagon. A white man, the first white man to come into this part of the country, left her and I and my men, when hunting, found her."

"And never found out who she was?"

"*M'Lungu*, for many, many days we hunted for the white man who was her father—it must have been her father for she always cried for him—but we never could follow which way he went or where he went. The only Kafir with the wagon waited long for his *baas* to return, but he never did. The Kafir is with us still. We brought away the horses and the wagon and oxen. That is why I, a Matabele, have horses. There were two horses and three mares. Those I have now are the offspring of them. And what is why I, a Matabele, have a rifle and cartridges. It is the rifle of the lost white man."

"He must have had a lot of ammunition for it to have lasted all this time."

The old chief looked seriously, almost as if hurt, at the white man.

"*M'Lungu*," he said quietly. "I am a friend of all the wild animals. All of my people are their friends. We do not kill for sport as the white men do. And if we need to kill we kill our own way and make sure there is no suffering. I have never fired the rifle."

The white man winced, but quickly changed the subject.

"Didn't the Kafir know what happened to his *baas*? Didn't he have any idea which way he went or why he went?"

"*M'Lungu*, the Kafir saw him disappear. A Kafir of a strange tribe came to him as he sat looking into the fire the first night he stayed beside the old round tower in the ruins. The Kafir told him he would lead him to the place where he found diamonds. The white man seemed dazed, but followed him. He never came back."

Painfully Charlie raised himself on to an elbow and looked fixedly into the eyes of the old chief.

"Was it a Kafir with two toes on each foot?"

"And red hair, *M'Lungu*."

For a full minute the white man looked around vacantly without seeing anything at all.

"Then I know where that white man is," he said presently in a thoughtful whisper.

* * *

"I'M GOING over to that ruined town tomorrow to look into that round tower," Charlie said one evening as he met the old chief inside the *kraal*.

For several days he'd been walking about getting his strength back, even been out shooting, and now was anxious to find things out for himself and then hurry to his store.

The old chief shook his head and visibly shuddered.

"*Ikona, M'Lungu. Pagati.*"

The white man laughed.

"To blazes with your witchcraft, father. An old man like you ought to know better."

Again the old man shook his head, almost sadly this time. "There are many things we do not know, *M'Lungu*. Things we must not know."

"That's all rubbish, father. There is an explanation for everything."

"Can the *M'Lungu* explain why he was lost?" the old man asked in an awed tone.

For an instant the white man was nonplussed.

"No," he said slowly. "That's just what I'm going to find out."

"Oh, yes, I will. Come with me tomorrow, father, and bring some of your young men. Bring shovels and what tools you have and let us clean out the tower and dig."

"The young men will never enter that place, *M'Lungu*. I told you it is *tagati*. They know it is *tagati*."

"Don't let them be so silly, father. Anyway I'm sure the girl will help me, if she is white. And the men can work in daylight and sleep miles away from the tower if they're afraid."

Dubiously the old man shook his head again.

"I am old, *M'Lungu,* and I have power with my people, but I think my power is not great enough to get men to enter that old tower. But I will ask if any willing to go. I will try. But, *M'Lungu,* there may be dead there. The dead are best left alone."

For the best part of a day the white man and half a dozen volunteers from the more brave hacked and chopped at the trees and tangled roots which fastened the fallen rocks together. And as a man the girl helped, too. By evening, but for rocks and stones, the place was clear. But long before the first shadows of sunset began to steal in and turn the sunlight into a ghostly gloom the men had left and were aiming miles away. And strangely, without knowing why, the white man went with them.

"Now we can dig," the white man said as, satisfied, he saw the last stones removed at midday next day. "Now we shall find out all there is to find."

The old chief stood away and his face was gray.

"I shall not help, *M'Lungu.* I am too old to offend the powers I do not know."

"Bosh! Let's dig."

Several of the young men stepped forward and with crude native shovels commenced digging where the white man indicated. For many yards around they threw up the earth, casting it behind them into the way through which they had entered. Most of the earth was the accumulation of centuries, of ages, and it was well toward evening when they reached the actual floor of the building. And again the whole crowd walked miles away for the night. And the white man went with them.

"Clang!" a shovel hit something solid. In an instant the men had jumped out of the holes in which they were working and gathered round. Three days now they'd been cutting through nothing but earth and this was the first time any of them had struck a hard substance.

"Clang!" again went the shovel. Excitedly the men in a body started in to clean out the hole. Soon a flat stone slab became visible. Soon they were digging down by the side of it and it was standing clear.

Perplexedly Charlie stood and gazed at the top of it. Seven feet long the slab was and about five wide. From end to end and side to side inscriptions covered it, yet with all his experience he easily knew that these inscriptions were different from any he had ever heard of or seen in any museum. The writings of a race gone and lost track of forever.

The slab stood a good foot above the bottom of the hole. Its sides were three or four inches wider than the square foundations on which it rested. The white man's curiosity overcame him.

"Stop digging, men," he ordered. "Help me to see if this slab can be moved."

Together they lifted and pushed, strained and struggled. But the people who placed that slab there had put it there to stay.

"Force some of your shovels under the edge and lift as we push," the white man suggested. Three or four shovels uselessly tried to pry under the slab, but the joint was too perfect.

"Let's hammer the thing aside with rocks."

A dozen times or more the rocks pounded in unison on the edge of the slab, even the girl in her excitement helping in. Slowly, slowly, very slowly the slab moved sidewise.

"Now one big smash."

Bang! The slab slid off and toppled over.

With a howling yelp each Kafir dropped his rock. With a wail—a shriek—each turned and charged the mound of earth behind him. A moment later the yelps, still shrill, were dying off into the far distance.

Charlie and the girl stood quite alone.

WITH arms crossed over their breasts the two well-preserved mummies lay in a corner of the huge, deep vault just as they had lain for centuries. Long centuries before. Beside the man's head on his left lay a small pile of uncut diamonds. On his other side a meerchaum pipe. By the side of the woman a pile of limbo, beads and coppers and brass wire. Across her chest beneath her withered arms a quantity of colored ribbons and scraps of a little child's clothing.

And through the many wrappings of the man were clearly visible two cloven feet.

For a moment the girl stood open-mouthed and looked down queerly at the woman. Just as the white man beside her she, too, wondered at the ray of light in the dim vault. A ray which didn't strike in from above. Somewhere in the back of the girl's mind was a memory which had lain dead for many years. The girl's mouth closed and a glorious smile of recognition lighted up her face.

"Mine," she said rapturously as she pointed to the clothing.

Curiously the white man stooped to peer into the depths.

"Yours," he said thoughtfully. "But how in the ——"

A shrill scream—a howling, crazy yell—came from behind. A furious, maddened, reckless, rasping bellow. And with it came a hurtling, clawing, scratching, yammering naked body. The hurtling body landed cleanly on the white man's back, and with brown arms tightly gripping his neck and brown legs locked round his waist the white man fell forward. But for his hands clutching wildly at the side of the vault his head had been battered and cracked.

With a startled squeal the girl jumped sidewise and ran to the farthest wall. Then turned and in horror watched the struggle starting before her. For several seconds she watched terrified; then the white man slowly regained himself and, levering at the arms locked round him and choking him, faced toward her.

Instantly her eyes went wide with amazement. Instantly another hidden memory flickered before her. And the eyes held firm, fascinated, on the claw like feet gripping together.

The white man gurgled; the locked arms were immovable. The white man gasped. The gasp was a breathless rattle. Desperately he clawed and tore at the skin of the arms. The skin was dry and tough as leather. Wildly he tugged and strained. The nails on his fingers cracked and blood came. And the thing, grimacing, stayed glued to him as if a part of him.

The white man's chest was bursting, his ribs cracking, yet the thing on his back held him as in the grip of an octopus. Stuck to him like a leech. And as he stuck his breath came in fierce short squeals.

Slowly, dizzily the white man commenced twisting round and round. His legs began wavering, the blood in his brain clouded his sight. Dully he reached round for his hunting-knife. That had been taken out to use and laid aside.

The knees gave and the white man went down. Desperately he struggled to his feet and half fell into the trench around the vault. Again he managed to right himself. But the trench was narrow, the calves of his legs touched the side of the vault; the clinging body was levering him over. Levering him over to drop him and crash the life out of him.

Wildly he tried to bend forward and get his balance, tried to fall forward and roll on the creature tormenting him. He hoped to crush and break the mouthing, gibing thing. Of a sudden the arms around his neck relaxed and the bony, sharp-clawed fingers dug into his throat. He groaned.

A wild, piercing, furious, vengeful yell seemed to fairly rip the old tower. A shovel, wielded by two healthy, vigorous arms came down with a hollow whack. Brown man and white, still locked together, hurtled backward to the bottom of the vault.

Like a monkey the girl had lowered herself and now bent over the white man. The Kafir beneath him lay perfectly still.

With painful effort the white man pulled himself away and squatted aside to get his breath. From scratches and nail-holes the blood trickled from his neck and dribbled in little streams over his shirt. His sight was dull and bleary.

Instantly as she landed the girl looked questioningly round. The first things her eyes lighted on were the baby-clothes clasped in the long-dead woman's arms. Ruthlessly, possessingly, she jerked them away. And with the tiny dresses of her babyhood she staunched the white man's wounds and wiped away his blood.

SHIVERING like a man stricken with ague Charlie carefully levered himself to his feet. With distinct misgiving he stretched his arms and felt himself. Gradually his brain cleared and he smiled curiously.

"That's one way of conducting archeological research," he said in ponderous English.

The glowing eyes of the brown girl very distinctly indicated that that was absolutely true, although she didn't understand a word of it.

Very gingerly, painfully, the white man stepped past the mummies and toward the ray of light in the side of the vault. Painfully he stooped and quietly investigated it.

"Clear as day," he went on, again in English. "Our two-toed friend must have found this passageway years and years ago, and here he's been living ever since. Living with his forebears and on the hoard of his forebears of five thousand years ago. A throwback to those forebears. Living with them and jealous lest any one should find them. I think I see now why he tried almost successfully to lose me. And why he's lost at least one other man before."

The curious smile grew wider.

"Must have been in there all the time we were digging. Bolted out just as the cover was pushed aside and came in through the tower to get me behind. Ten to one that's why the other Kafirs kept up such a howling after they got clear away."

The girl, listening patiently, moved aside and, stooping picked up the carefully colored meerchaum. With modest, girlish wistfulness she handed it shyly to the white man. And with a sensation he somehow scarcely understood he took it from her.

"I wish you'd always be around to hand that to me when I needed it—Mary," he said without knowing exactly why.

Together the two moved over to the little pile of diamonds. Luxuriously, fascinatedly, Charlie picked them up and dribbled them through his sore fingers into his hat, the girl's eyes gleaming as she watched him.

"Be enough to last the two of us for all our lives?" he asked in Kafir.

Smiling, the girl was silent.

"Not enough? Not even with these two?"

Hastily his hand went inside his shirt and came out again with a belt. Excitedly he unfastened rag after rag, rag after rag.

"Not even with these two?" he asked again as he held up the diamonds. "One of them is yours anyway."

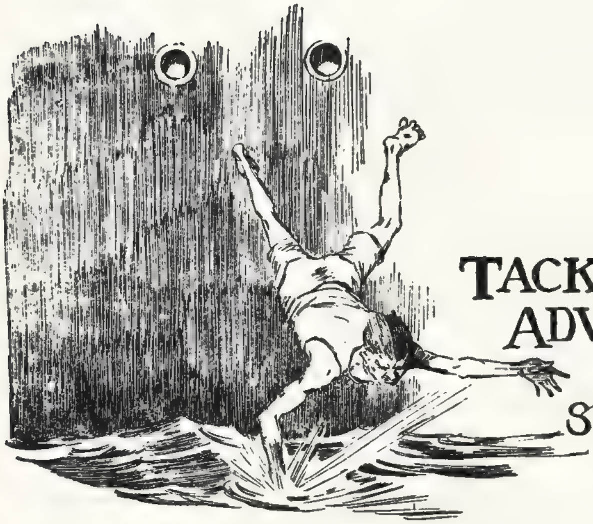
Hesitatingly the girl turned and looked at the brown man lying motionless, then looked questioningly back into the face of the man beside her.

"Hang it, I see what you're thinking," Charlie broke out suddenly. "Why, only these two diamonds belong to us after all! All the rest and even my old pipe belong to Two Toes."

Jumpily the white man stepped over to the motionless Kafir. Almost sorrowingly he bent down and gently shook him. Again he shook him, then felt his chest.

With a queer catch in his still aching throat he straightened himself and held out a hand to the brown girl.

"We'll go out by the private entrance, girlie. And we'll put the cover on again," he said very seriously. "It seems old Two Toes has come home for good."



TACKLINE'S ADVENTURE *

by

STANLEY S. SCHNETZLER

"TACKLINE" BRADY acquired his nickname one July morning in the harbor of Gibraltar. A silver cup had been offered in the Fleet to the ship showing the highest percentage of proficient swimmers on board. Three weeks were allowed for training the men to swim the required one hundred and twenty yards.

A notice regarding this trophy was posted in all compartments on the ship. Brady noticed it. In fact, he even spelled through the first few words. But, finding them dry reading, he gave the remainder "the quick and careless" and swaggered up on deck humming a popular British sailor tune, "Don't Get Drunk, You Bally, Bloomin' Lunk," which he had heard on shore the night before. As a result of his indifference he was quite surprized when some days later the men were mustered by divisions on the forecastle.

"In connection with the Fleet Trophy, the silver cup, of which you all have probably read on the bulletin boards in your compartments," the division officer announced, "we shall have our first drill today. Get ready!"

Brady just scratched his head.

"Fleet Trophy? Silver cup?" he thought. "What's the big idea, anyhow?"

Turning to his neighbor, who already stood stripped to his underclothing, he whispered behind his hand:

"Say, sailor, what goes on——"

"Silence in the ranks, there, Brady!" from the division officer. "Get busy and crawl out of your uniform!"

"Aye, aye, sir," answered the bewildered Brady humbly.

"What's the idea of getting rid of the uniform? Why stand around on deck in the Beeveedees?" he argued to himself. "If they're trying to pick a he-Annettekellerman for shape and beauty, that sure lets me out!"

"Shake it up there, Brady. You're the last man to get ready," came the impatient voice of the officer.

Brady literally leaped free from the rest of his uniform.

For a moment, double rows of nainsook-clad figures faced each other on the forecastle. Then, at the command, they turned toward the bow, and, like great, white gulls, man after man dived over the side. Game, but perplexed, Brady watched the line of men ahead of him dwindling rhythmically. He approached ever nearer the ominous edge of the deck, wondering vaguely why the man behind him was continually stepping on his heels.

Finally his feet rested on the sharp rim of the ship's side, his toes projecting into space. He glanced quickly below him at the endless distance to the water's surface, threw his arms at right angles to his body, shut his eyes tightly, and shoved with his feet. He struck the water flat, disappeared—

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and failed to return to the surface. The next man in line paused an instant, then dived deeply, and finally dragged to the ship's side a pale, half-drowned Brady.

Later, after his limp body had been rolled vigorously over an empty gasoline drum, Brady was called into conference by his division officer.

"That wasn't a very good dive you made, was it, Brady?"

"There sure seemed to be somethin' the matter with it, sir—but I got there after all, didn't I?"

The officer tried to swallow a smile.

"Well, after you 'got there', why didn't you strike out and swim? Breath sort of knocked out of you, was it?"

"Yes, I guess it was, sir. I don't seem to remember much what happened after I left the deck. But—you see—it's this way, sir—I never tried to dive or swim a stroke in my life before. But I saw all the other guys going over the side, so I sort of figured I ought to try to keep up my end—just do my part, for the good name of the ship."

The captain, hearing of the incident later, chuckled, "Well, in my day, that's what we used to call a tackline trick."

The captain's negro mess-boy overheard the remark and told it to the ship's cook. The cook passed it on to a friendly machinist mate, and he, of course, told every one else on board.

SO IN this way Thomas Brady ceased to be and "Tackline" Brady came into existence. And in many ways the nickname fitted him like a rubber glove. For in quartermaster lingo a tackline is that part of a flag signal which represents a space between words, a blank, a void, a nothingness. And that, in most respects, was Thomas Brady.

In other ways the nickname was highly unjust. For, after all, he did possess a quaint, peculiar type of intelligence. For one thing, it was noticed that he could never be bested in a forecastle clash of wits. Disconcerted? Baffled? Yes, indeed, but only for a moment. Then suddenly he would bristle and snap back at a jibe or sarcasm like an undersized Scotch terrier. And his reply was usually such that it crackled and stung as it sank home.

In this scrappy, rough-and-tumble part of life, Tackline was well able to stand on two feet. But for a real knowledge of seamanship, for a fine distinction between the relative importance of admirals and apprentice seamen, for anything involving much judgment and discrimination, his mind was, after all, just tackline.

For instance, he could see no sense in learning to take soundings of the depth of the water.

"If you're in deep water," he once argued, "you're all right; and if you've got in where the water's too shallow, it's too late anyhow. So what's the use of takin' soundin's?"

"Aw, you salmon-head," growled Jerry Dougherty, thoroughly disgusted.

For, to Jerry's way of thinking, a man might well be ignorant of history, know nothing of science and have to sign his name with an 'X', but if he could heave a lead he could make his way in the world. This, of course, was because Jerry was already a full-fledged boatswain, while Tackline was only third-class quartermaster. And Jerry was salty as a mackerel and knew it; while Tackline was a lubber and every one else knew it.

"If you'd only have let me learn you," continued Jerry, "you might've taken a few soundin's before you got in such deep water with that spig dame, Margarita."

"She may've got me in a little over my depth," retorted Tackline with a swagger, "but she sure left you high and dry on the rocks."

This remark pleased the forecastle greatly, for all of them often smiled among themselves at Jerry's ill-concealed love for the pretty proprietress of what was popularly called "The Garden of the Gobs."

This eternal readiness to fight back, verbally or fistically, was probably what saved Tackline. For under ordinary circumstances any one as thick as he would have been the butt of every forecastle joke. His life would have been one endless round of water-filled sea-boots and cockroached clothing.

But Tackline throve in spite of his every handicap. And handicaps he had aplenty. In the first place, there was the matter of his personal appearance. As one of the sea-lawyers, bookworms, on board described him, he was certainly "a wart on the face of Nature." A block or so away he surely wasn't much to look at.

He was short, and his white, circular cap constantly rode high on a crop of excelsior-like red hair. His low-cut sailor blouse only served to accentuate an over-sized, bobbing Adam's apple. And the bell-shaped legs of his trousers flopped audibly about bony knock-knees.

But in his eyes there was hidden the true Tackline. It almost seemed as if Nature, when she had completed this work of creation, stood off and looked it over. Then, deeply penitent, she had tried to square herself with Tackline and with the world by blessing him with this "he man" spirit that gleamed from his eyes.

Without this spirit it would have been impossible for a little five-footer like Tackline to fight and swear his way from quartermaster third-class to first-class—and back again. His shipmates liked to tell how he would wade into a brawling forecastle and deal out sleeping-powders with both fists. As Timmy Rafferty said, one morning, through swollen lips—

"I never seen one man swing so many fists in my life before."

On the ship he would try to outfight and would invariably outtalk the best man on board. But ashore, as soon as he looked into the mocking eyes of Margarita, Tackline was helpless. She overwhelmed him when he was with her. She haunted him when he was not. All day, about deck, he need only close his eyes to see again her queer little skeptical smile.

AND it was this pastime of seeing skeptical smiles that caused him to grow so strangely absent-minded and silent this particular afternoon. He was sitting on the edge of his bunk, planning to get into liberty blues for the evening's trip ashore. But instead, he just sat and dreamed, staring straight before him. Finally, after a long, forlorn sigh, he mumbled audibly—"Well, guess tain't no use."

"Hittin' the beach tonight, Brady?" shouted Dougherty from the forward compartment.

From instinct Tackline thrust his grime-ingrained feet ceilingward, to protect his face from flying shoes.

"Oh—why—yes. Sure—sure 'nough, the Lord Mayor's waitin' five o'clock tea till he sees me shinin' face at his door, to pay my official call."

"Come on, don't try to lay down no smoke screen. I know what your official course and port'll be as soon as them barnacle-collectors of yours hit dry land. Full speed of a gharry up to the Garden."

"Won't need to take no starsight on that cruise neither," added another. "All you need to steer by is that light in Margarita's eyes that you sit here moanin' about all the time we're at sea."

"Why don't you lay off'n that spig dame, like I told you to?" asked Jerry seriously.

"If I didn't stick around, she'd spend all her time making a fool out of you, Jerry. Do you remember the evenin' she kept callin' you loco and you thought that was Spanish for 'beautiful?"

"Aw, pipe down, you quartermaster—third class," came Jerry's time-hallowed retort.

It was very old, but Jerry handled it like a new trick in repartee.

Their remarks were interrupted by the "soupy, soupy" call on the bugle, summoning them to supper. Tackline hurried to the table, gulped down his chow excitedly, and shoved off.

Reaching St. George's Lane, near the water-front, he jumped into a passing gharry and told the driver to break all speed records to the top of the Rock. Between the yelpings of the driver and the creakings of the gharry Tackline had little time for revery on the trip. As the road grew steeper the pace grew slower. Finally in impatience Tackline jumped out.

"I'm goin' to walk, old sleepin' sickness. If I had more time I'd ride with you. But if you don't come alongside before I reach the garden I won't wait to pay you, so you'd better crack on a few more knots."

At this the driver himself jumped down and, hauling on the reins, frantically dragged horse and gharry after him.

"Here's your pay, old gin-mill," Tackline announced to the puffing driver as they reached the Garden hedge. "And get that old bag-of-bones you've got hitched to your gharry some oats when you get back to town, or he'll never finish another trip up the Rock alive."

"Yes, indeed, sir. I will that, sir," the cabby promised earnestly, glancing at the ten-shilling note in his hand. "These bloomin' Yanks is sure top-hole when it comes to pay," he mused, as he turned his horse's head back toward town.

But now that he was so near his loved one Tackline found his self-assurance weakening. In fact, his feet dragged more and more as he neared the gate to the Garden of the Gobs. Finally, pausing, he picked a sprig of hawthorn from the hedge. This he pulled apart nervously, leaf by leaf. Somehow he couldn't seem to gather together his forecastle courage.

From the Garden, to his right, came, during lulls in the conversation of the sailor guests, low, vibrant, feminine notes of "Carissima Mia." As he listened, gradually his spirit was calmed and his courage returned. Turning, he looked toward the harbor.

There, against the thick, shiny, blackness of the water, glimmered the lights of all there was of America in the Mediterranean. Down there were his flag, his ships, his countrymen. On those decks were others like himself, who talked of Manhattan and dreamed of Coney Island. Suddenly he ceased being just Tackline. He was no longer just a lonely gob on a friendless road. He was a part of all that fairyland below him. He was an American.

Suddenly the weariness of stormy cruises, the chilling cheerlessness of battle-gray bulkheads, the subtle indefinable loneliness that comes from long days apart from homes and home-makers, all these melted from his spirit in the peace of this scene, as a mounting wave recedes from the bow of a ship.

"Well, I didn't come up here just for the walk," he said to himself. "I'd better be gettin' where I'm goin'."

With his shoulders thrown back he walked over and leaned on the gate. To him a sight of the Garden was like looking into the face of an old friend. There were the familiar unvarnished pine tables, carved by the blades of a hundred sea-going jackknives. There were the same red-and-green-chimneyed oil lanterns, looking incriminatingly like the regulation running-lights of a battleship, shedding their Christmas-tree glow on the guests.

But where was Margarita? Usually he could tell her location by the flock of sailors about her, even if he couldn't see her for the crowd.

"She's a sly little devil," he thought. "She's waitin' for me back in the rose-garden. It's more what she calls *romantica*.

So he lost no time in starting for the rear of the Garden. On the way, the swaying branch of a rose-bush brushed his hand. He clapped the bleeding scratches to his mouth, muttering first a very audible swear word. Just beyond him, Margarita started and turned toward him guiltily. Glancing past her to the other occupant of the little wicker bench built for a person and a half, Tackline saw the bulky form and self-contented smile of Boatswain Jerry Dougherty.

"Well, I'll be—sure enough!" Tackline thought to himself. "The old fox! He didn't wait for chow. Told the skipper he had to get up town before the shops closed to get some seizing-line. So this is the kind of seizing-line!"

Jerry, on the other hand, felt thoroughly pleased with himself.

"Seems to be one of our third-class customers, dearest," he remarked, with an affectionate glance toward Margarita.

In the meantime, Margarita had succeeded in recovering herself.

"Oh, eet ees the leetle Señor Brady!"

How Tackline hated to be called little!

"I heard the music and thought it was Tony, the blind fiddler," Tackline lied gamely, forgetting, for the moment, the striking difference between the notes of a violin and those of a guitar. "Is guitar playin' makin' her blind too, or is it so dark that she doesn't have to see that face of yours, Jerry?"

Tackline turned to go. "Don't go, Meester Brady. Please do not go. To you I shall show the beautiful gift my Jerry bring to me to make more beautiful my Garden," pleaded the unhappy Margarita. "See!"

She pointed to the upper edge of the hedge that bordered the Garden on three sides. A set of obsolete, discarded signal-flags rippled there in colorful splendor. Tackline had to admit to himself that they made the place look quite rag-time.

"My Jerry, he think of me always; when he is on the shore, when he is at sea. He never forget—so different from many other friend! He help me now to make the Garden—what you call, full of success. But now, when many come to buy my *vino* and *pulveroni*, I have not the chair where they can sit, the table where they can set the glasses and cut their name. I order more, long time ago, from Madrid, but they no come. But my Jerry, he will help me to get the chair and the tables, is it not so, my Jerry?"

For the smile she gave Jerry Tackline would have got her a whole furniture factory.

"I wonder where she gets this 'my Jerry' stuff," mused Tackline, as he again turned to go. "Perhaps she's only pullin' the old boy's leg. But I wish I knew where I stood in this thing."

Tackline may have noticed the secret look of disappointment which Margarita gave him as he wished her "*buenos noches.*" But, if he did, his spirits were too downcast, by his being replaced by Jerry, to rally at this encouragement.

He, who had left the ship treading on fairy mist, returned dragging heavy feet through a mire of dejection.

Next morning, Tackline failed miserably in signal drill. Jerry Dougherty stood on the forecastle and grinned.

* * *

BUT by afternoon Tackline himself was grinning contentedly. He was spending most of his time in individual conferences with ten of his closest friends. Each he invited to go with him that evening to Algeciras, the little Spanish town just across the harbor.

"Don't say nothin' about this party. It's pretty deep stuff. But if you'll say you'll be with us I'll try to get the skipper to let us take the motor whale-boat. And remember this, sailor, it's goin' to be—a—large—evenin'."

The ten in turn readily agreed, promising in the meantime absolute secrecy as to the trip. But Tackline knew the hardest job would be to get the use of the whale-boat. Undaunted, he braced the executive officer.

"Sir, you may've heard of my swimmin' and divin' exhibition the other day."

"I not only heard of it many times, Brady," chuckled the officer, "but had the privilege of seeing it."

"Well, sir, I think I can improve on that—do better, I mean—do the thing as it should be done, if I could have a little practise. Now, several of the guys tells me they'll teach me. And, I wondered, sir, if we could get the motor whale-boat for a swimmin' party after chow tonight."

"Well, that's asking a good deal, Brady, you know. But, this once, I'll take a chance tonight with the whale-boat, just as you took a chance the other day with your life."

With hurried thanks Tackline hastened on deck and kept watch of the gangway. Finally, to his relief, he saw Boatswain Dougherty leave the ship, a heavy aroma of hair lotion and scented soap following him.

The swimming party hurried through supper, climbed down the swinging jacob's ladder at the end of the boom and dropped into the whale-boat below.

"Start the old percolator," shouted Tackline to Timmy Rafferty, who had appointed himself engineman. Tackline himself took the wheel and headed the boat toward a strip of neutral ground which separated Gibraltar from Spain proper.

This is the only really lawless piece of land in civilization. No nation on the globe owns or controls it. That was really the reason Tackline beached the whale-boat there.

On the beach, a conference was called.

"Who's never been to José Toredo's, that spig sidewalk café just inside the Algeciras gate?" Tackline inquired.

No reply.

"All been there?"

"Sure, lots of times," came the reply.

"Ever get away without bein' short-changed?"

"Duck ever go swimmin' without gettin' her feathers wet?" chirped some one.

"Cut the foolish questions!" growled another.

Evidently this was a tender subject. Apparently José had been enriching himself in true continental style—by overcharging the bluejackets.

"Well, listen to old man Brady's son. Tonight you'll collect every cent the old nickel-nurser ever robbed you of. We'll get it all back—and some more. And we'll have a wine-fest and perhaps a battle-royal to boot. A three-ring bull-fight will be a blind man's picnic aside of this. We wine and dine, as Holy Joe says, and José foots the bill. And bab-e-e-e, such wine! Oo-oo, là, là! No rot-gut tonight. Not on your life. *Bueno vino* for Thomas Brady and his salty friends."

Timmy Rafferty sat on the gunwale of the whale-boat. As Tackline painted this brilliant picture, Timmy hummed the old refrain:

"It may be so, but I don't know,
It sounds so dawggone queer,
You'll have to try some other place,
That moonshine don't go here!"

"How's all this goin' to happen?" asked one of the party.

"Here's the dope. Keep your eye on the

clock in the church steeple. When it points to ten, lay back your ears and tuck in your whiskers. Then's when the fireworks begin. Now get the big idea! The waiters change shifts at ten o'clock. The dopey ones lay below and the new ones come on deck. We'll go over now—if we can get through the gate—and order the finest of everything, and keep orderin' till ten o'clock. When the old waiters go in and before the new shift comes on the job, for a minute the sidewalk's clear of José's men. That's when our dirty work comes in. Now get this straight. Grab every chair and table you can carry—they're of very fine quality wicker—and start for neutral ground with your full-speed pennant flyin'. And for the love of Margarita, work fast!"

"You got to hand it to the kid. He's clever," commented Timmy.

So the swimming party sauntered slowly toward the rococo stucco gate of the town. Here, during the day, a *gendarme* was stationed to prevent the exportation of certain foods to the more lucrative market of Gibraltar. At night the chief himself kept watch, to prevent the entrance of suspicious-looking characters. It was not that Algeciras felt herself so saintly. It was only that she feared to become less so.

In Algeciras, however, Tackline had ceased to be a suspicious character. He was now a thoroughly discredited character. His besetting weakness had been his ability too quickly to catch both the spirit and the spirits of the town.

"Ha, eet ees my friend of many other visits who honors us with the call this evening," the chief greeted Tackline. "You come to spend the evening—here at the gate with me? Or will you begin immediately the journey home?" with a suggestive flourish of his saber in the direction of Gibraltar.

"Why, we just thought we'd sort of drop over and say hello to you. I was just sayin' to my friends here that it had been a long time since you had walked down here to the gate with me and showed me the way to go home—with the business-end of a sword."

Tackline felt reassured when the chief smiled at this. In fact, he immediately proceeded to make himself entirely at home. Leaning against one of the stucco pillars of the gate, he flipped some tobacco into a creased sheet of rice paper.

"Like to roll yourself a fool-killer?" he asked, dangling the muslin sack toward the chief.

THERE Tackline won the evening's victory. Whether he knew it or not, he was tempting the chief with his pet vice. Better even than wine, he liked good tobacco. But that vile Spanish weed! Eet ees imposeeble! Eet put moss on even the smoothest tongue! But Virginia leaf, so mild, so sweet, so full of aroma! Like a breath from the hills of Malaga!

"You are only more thoughtful than you are generous—my friend." The chief smiled cordially through a noseful of smoke.

"Well, I just had a hunch you'd enjoy seein' us. Pretty dopey job you got here, ain't it? No chance to talk to no one; no chance to park yourself, no chance to step over now and then and rush the growler in that little blaze-of-glory that's all lit up in there!"

Timmy Rafferty was standing by, on one leg, trying to help Tackline in his intrigue. Here was his cue.

"That's José Toredo's place. I hear he's got some real champagne from Seville now. The sea-lawyer in our compartment said it was 'soft and warm like they'd poured pure Spring sunshine into the bottles!' "

Timmy made a long, moist, gurgling sound with his lips.

"It's the big piece of luck, chief, that there's nothin' much doin' here at the gate tonight," continued Tackline, following Timmy's adroit lead. "Drag yourself over with us and have a snifter of this high-toned blood-warmer. What do you say? You can lamp the gate from there as well as from here."

"Oh, *señor*, do not tempt me from the duty," replied the chief with a diminishing tone of conviction.

"Aw, forget it. It's a sixty-forty proposition anyhow. You ought to be guardin' the gate; we ought to be holdin' a swimmin' party. So, what's the odds? Come on, snap out of your hop. Step along *pronto* with us. We'll sit on the curbin' and shoot snipes—I mean, smoke cigarets. What do you say, old-timer?"

"Perhaps eet ees poseeble for me to go with you for one leetle moment, my generous friends, and I can from there discover how well I can perform my duty absent from here. But remember! One leetle sip of wine—and one cigaret!"

So, the center of a grinning, jostling, exultant crowd of bluejackets, the chief was escorted to a place at the end wicker table.

"Yes—eet ees poseeble—this will do very well—for a moment," he remarked, as he settled himself in the ample wicker chair—"of very fine quality," as Tackline had remarked.

Tackline glanced at the clock in the steeple of the church of the Holy Virgin. It stood at nine-thirty. He hastily ordered wine—and more wine, opening another sack of makin's, which he laid near the chief's elbow.

Five, ten, fifteen minutes passed. The chief was amazed at the rapidity with which his glass was refilled with this delicious wine. It seemed he could never empty it.

At ten minutes to ten, however, he began to realize that Señor Brady's voice was growing faint and far away. The chairs, the tables, the pavement under his feet, even the worm-eaten pillars of the café began to undulate like waves of Summer heat. Señor Brady's face looked strangely out of proportion. First it was too long, and the little hat on top seemed a perpendicular streak of white. Then it was too wide, and the hat stuck out like an emaciated pancake. Suddenly the chief began weeping quietly.

Slowly, very slowly, he began to realize what was wrong. In fact, he could already see himself being carried from the floor of José's cafe the following morning. He knew that he should leave at once. He wavered to his feet.

"*Señores*, you have been ver' kind; wine ver' fine; ver' warm evening," he acknowledged, mopping his forehead.

Tackline realized that at all costs he must delay the chief's attempted departure. But with what subject could he divert his attention for a moment?

"I say, chief—have you ever—did you ever—just a minute, chief, before you go—did you ever see—a fellow roll a cigaret with one hand?"

Here was a subject of interest to the chief. Also he felt tremendously drowsy. So he settled slowly back into his chair. Limply his body glided downward from the wicker chair of very fine quality.

The hands of the clock marked ten. Even as the chief settled to the sidewalk, Tackline lifted to his shoulders the table which would have sheltered the descending form. And a grotesque, unshapely procession started rapidly and silently for the unguarded town gate and for neutral ground not far beyond.

Leading the parade was a swaying, pitching, animated wicker table—Tackline's sparse five feet surmounted by his excelsior hair, his hair by his round, white hat, and the hat by a champagne-drenched table-top. Four wicker legs, projecting downward, rasped painfully against bony knock-knees.

Bringing up the rear was grinning Timmy Rafferty, who had paused long enough to add to his already bulky collection a chair just vacated by the chief of the Algeciras Gendarmerie.

In reality Timmy was not bringing up the rear. For far behind, waddled perspiring José Toredo, followed by a gesticulating serpentine of waiters—both shifts.

Neutral ground, a sandy beach, the friendly depths of the whale-boat, a gasoline-choked *putt-putt-putt* of the engine, a final, powerful shove by the trailing Timmy, and the animated café departed Spain.

At the water-front in Gibraltar there is the mouth of a dark, slippery alley that runs up the face of the Rock. It was here that Tackline secured the whale-boat to an iron ring in the cement wall and the party clambered ashore.

There was much groaning on the part of a few of the less vigorous of the party. Tackline encouraged them, assuring them that "they ought to be glad this was such fine quality wicker and not solid oak." Up the alley they struggled to the Garden of the Gobs.

Finally the party paused to rest in the shadow of the hawthorn hedge. Very distinctly on the night air they could hear voices.

"Why so distant, little one? Come, kiss your Jerry."

Then mocking laughter.

"My Jerry! My Jerry! I laugh till the weepings come to my eye. You are so—what you say—'t'ick'—if you think I ever love you. I make for you just one leetle joke."

"A joke on me?"

"Oh, yes! Does *señor* think he would

have the joke on me, eh? No, no, no, no! Many times I call you 'My Jerry,' but eet ees only to make Señor Teckline—what you call—jealous. Oh, how I long for the handsome Meester Brady!"

"Did you hear that, youse guys," came a whisper from under a four-legged wicker table of very fine quality.

At this Tackline stepped forward, tilting the table to the back of his head.

"I'm pretty late I guess—and I see you got callers—such as they are!"

And he paused with mock surprize, as he eyed Jerry.

Margarita said nothing. She clapped her hand to her breast, caught her breath and with an involuntary sob almost rushed the beweighted Tackline from his feet. The wicker table of that far-famed quality went spinning from his head. But Tackline didn't care. He was gasping happily, smothered in the embrace of the impassioned Margarita.

"Oh, my Teckline, my beautiful one, *bonitissimo mio*, eet ees you, only you I longed to see."

"Well, by tomorrow you'll probably have to go to Spain to look for him," Jerry suggested gruffly. "For, I've seen them tables and chairs before, and I happen to know that the chief over in Algeciras ain't no particular friend of that third-class quartermaster."

"Oh, the chief's all right, restin' comfortably, thank you, spendin' the night at José's."

"Come on, what do you mean, at José's?"

"Why, on the sidewalk there!"

"You don't mean you drunk him under the table, do you?"

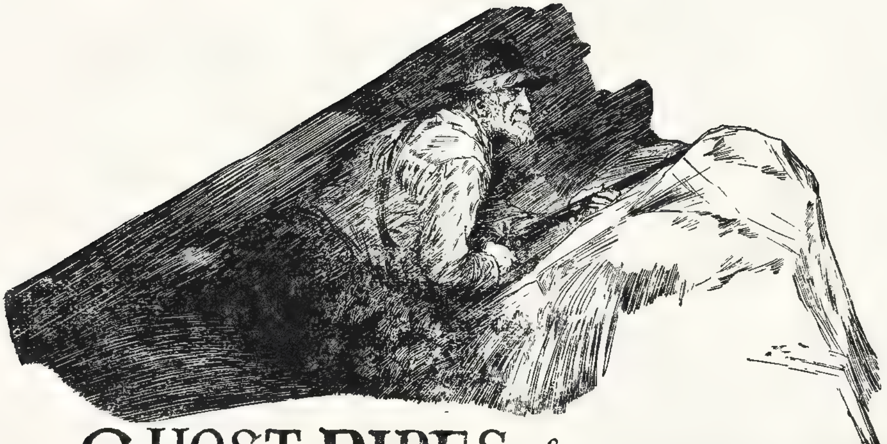
"No, the table was on my bean before he really had a fair chance to ease under it." Then, glancing up at the beaming Margarita: "Will that guy be here long? If he's stickin' around, he might as well get to work. Grab a chair or a table, Jerry, and let's deal 'em around the Garden."

Jerry assured them he was on his way. So the members of the swimming party busied themselves distributing the furniture.

Margarita and Tackline, meanwhile, crept away to the fragrant shadows of the rose garden. Softly, rapturously, Margarita sang again the tender love-notes of "Carissima Mia."

Tackline, as he gazed into the glowing eyes of the singer, with a catch in his voice, whispered ardently—

"And to think of all the years I been missin' this."



GHOST-PIPES by STEPHEN CHALMERS

Author of "Lure of the Lode," "The Dance of the Golden Gods," etc.

"GILA" FERGUS, who had been staring at the camp-fire for the best part of an hour, suddenly became rigid, save that his thin, muscular, right hand tightened over the nicotine-stained clay pipe and his jaw-muscles twitched curiously. His every sense seemed to be straining toward something vague, distant, invisible.

Immediately around him, beyond the ring of faces by the fire, circled the gray tents of the cavalry company. Beyond that was the half-desert land covered with sagebrush, greasewood and growths of cacti grotesquely in keeping with the weird, shifting-shaped wonderland of geological delirium which is peculiarly Arizona.

"Dinna ye hear it?" muttered Fergus, addressing no one apparently.

The circle of blurred faces about the camp-fire—Indian, Mexican and American—turned toward the Scot where he sat, an archaic figure in fringed buckskin, a relic of the middle century, even to the beaded pipe-case swung from his neck. He was armed obsoletely, too. He still stuck to the long-barreled, muzzle-loading rifle of earlier Indian-fighting days. A strange figure in the year 1886, and daily becoming stranger.

Into the momentary lull came the restless movings of the hobbled mounts, the footfall of the guards about the temporary encampment and a murmur of voices from the tent where Lieutenant Gaillard conferred with his chief scout, Leacock, over the probable whereabouts of that band which had detached itself from Geronimo, probably as a blind. It might even be that the "Tiger" himself was with the detachment, and the main band, which Crooke pursued more to the southward, a ruse to draw the general's forces from the main quarry.

Overhead the stars twinkled and snapped in an atmosphere so rare that the lungs seemed to yawn in taking hold of it. Over to the right, the moon, a little past the full, was trying to clear a cluster of inferno-like rock pinnacles which stood up in sinister blackness against a hell-lighted background.

"Dinna ye hear it?" repeated the Gila, his eyes straining into the fire.

The half-breed Kiowa looked toward the pinnacle rocks, his bronze profile in sharp relief against the radiance of the coming moon. The Mexicans exchanged glances of superstitious uneasiness. An Irish teamster cursed softly, while one of the white scouts—Ringer, who knew—studied the rigid pose of the grizzled, long-haired Scot with a look of tolerance not unmixed with pity.

Presently the straining figure in buckskin relaxed. Deliberately the hot ashes were tapped from the blackened clay pipe and the latter placed carefully in the beaded pouch. The thin, sinewy hand of the Scot reached for the long-barreled rifle.

Slowly the Gila rose to his feet and stood still for a moment, the rifle-stock grounded between his moccasined feet, his hands clasped around the barrel which reached to his chin, the lifted head seeming to add several inches to the man's six feet two.

Only his tongue betrayed his race. Nothing else. The long hair about his neck was no more lusterless and colorless than that of a score of other plainsmen of his years, experience and manner of life. He looked to be all of sixty years, but Leacock and Ringer—who knew!—said he was little over fifty.

Only a moment did he stand there, his eyes fixed with a half-insane, wholly berserk gleam on some invisible thing beyond the grotesque pinnacles. Presently he moved slowly out of the radiance of the fire and disappeared beyond the tents, his drab figure merging with the ground-hue.

Around the fire a spell was broken with the Gila's going. An icy draft had passed, and again the warmth of congeniality flowed through men's veins. Only Ringer remained looking at the fire in reverie.

"Phwut the —— ails the owld Sandy anyway?" asked the Irish teamster, who was new to the West. "That's the third time since we come out that the Heely Monsther's had the delirious trimmins an' *hairin'* things. If he's afther doin' ut too ofthen I'll be timptid to aask him a quistion —just wan!"

"Huh!" grunted Ringer.

"Phwut! Just *phwut!* Phwut the —— is *ut* he's aaskin' us av we hair?"

"Ghost-pipes," said Ringer without inflection, and still looking at the fire.

"Gh-ghost-pipes!" stammered the Irishman blankly. "Ph-phwut's that? Will ut be that owld dhudeen he's forivir suckin' at? Faith, an' it's no wonder he's seein' divils an' hairin' thim. 'Tis as black as me funiril hat an' smells like sulfir an' brimstun'."

"Pipes—pipes! *Bag*pipes!" snapped out Ringer, irritated by the Irishman's gabble.

"Bagpipes? Howly smoke! Div yez tell me that? An' is ut thim he's hairin' aall the time? Faith, an' that's a terrible affliction. T' be haunted by bagpipes, wakin' an' sleepin'! D'ye ivir hair the like? An' were ye afther sayin' it's a—a ghost that's playin' thim in his crazy capoot?"

A voice drawled from the other side of the fire.

"Suppose you tells him the story, Dave, an' let's hev peace. Seems like every noocomer hez t' be initiated. An' there's some p'ints ez ain't clear to me neither."

"Thar ain't no story," said the plainsman gruffly; "leastways none for sartain. The main part of it ain't in no ways explainable. It's jest what some of us hez picked up in thirty-odd year, settin' around camp-fires an' hearin' the Gila talk when the spells is on him."

II

"THE Gila," said Ringer, the scout, "ain't all there in the *cabeza*. But he ain't no ways to blame for that. What the ol' bag of thistles goes through that time by Point of Rocks, east of Wagon Mound, gives him full license to think hisself half-brother to Queen Victoria or marri't to a skunk, whichever way his mind happens to be strayin'.

"But he don't have no fits like that, the Gila don't. He's jest loco about bagpipes. He hears 'em every so often—mostly in the night—an' keeps on hearin' 'em till he goes out with his ol' Sizzle-Stick an' downs an Apache. Offerin' t' bet ye, Irish, ye'll see a new notch on the Gila's gunstock afore mornin'."

"Ye do!" gasped the Irish teamster, popeyed.

"He don't fancy Apaches none, the Gila don't," Ringer went deliberately. "Apaches don't lie awake nights thinkin' lovin' thoughts of him either.

"As I pieces the song, Gila Fergus comes into these yere parts along in the fifties, sometime between the States buyin' up New Mexico an' findin' time after the Civil War to look after it. Durin' them years this ol' Santa Fé Trail is no salubrious resort; leastways never advertised as a ha'r restorer. From Independence to Ash Fork it ain't even healthy f'r a bald-headed *hombre*.

"This Fergus—which we calls 'The Gila' —comes into the West with his master, the which is a Scotchy who must ha' been a *gran señor* back home. When we first takes the Gila to our bosoms—he's about twenty-six or seven then—he wears a skirt, one of them waggly things they calls a kilt, an' a war-bunnet with feathers 'twould ha' tickled a medicine-man stiff. He has silver buckles on his shoes, a bit of a stiletto stuck in his stockin'-leg an' some sort of ha'r apron which he says is a 'splookan'[*] —

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[*] Splookan—probably spleuchan—sporran worn before the kilt.

though I don't *sabe* the animile nohow.

"Oh, he was the gay-clad young thing, that ol' fossil ye see now, when we picks him up on the prairie over thirty year ago. Silver on his war-bunnet, too, with some sort of design an' outlandish words worked in the ore—an' a red-an'-green shawl fastened with a big yaller topaz on his left shoulder. The buttons of his coat is likewise silver, with that same design cut in 'em.

"We takes him f'r at least a prince or a duke. But after, when he's able to talk an' no more afeared uv his own shadder, he tells us—Bill Comstock, Dick Curtis an' some of us that have been trappin' up on Medicine Bow and brung our pelts down to the river—tells us he ain't nothin' like that, but a plain sarvint, or valet, or butler, or what ye've a mind to.

"It seems he's all that's left of a caravan that comes out from the Missouri for Santa Fé some months before—fifty-three or fifty-four—I disremembers exackly now.

"It ain't no Gov'mint train, but it has an escort; four or five traders j'inin' up in one caravan an' gettin' a small comp'ny of soldiers to pertect the whole outfit. There's maybe five or six wagons in the train, besides a couple score of mules loaded in pack.

"Travelin' with one of the traders in preference to the stage-coach—which has been on the trail four or five years now—is this Scotch *señor* who seems to have been some *hombre* if we believes what the Gila tells us afterward. This *gran señor's* name is Young, or Roy, or Arden-Keppel, or McAulay.

"I never could get it straight, excep' thet the Gila most always speaks of him as Young Roy of Arden-Keppel. I reck'n he's some young blood full of dissatisfaction an' divil an' hankerin' after adventure. An' by the great horn spoon he gets it!

"It seems he'd ruther travel with the traders' caravan so he c'n get a crack at buff'ler an' the like when there's no smell of red in the air. 'Cordin' to Fergus—meanin' the Gila—Young Roy takes his place with the rest when it comes to fightin' off the varmints, an' when that young feller draws a bead, somethin' drops.

"Fergus, in the days when ye could believe him at least half the time—that's before he gets noises in his *cabeza*—says how this Young Roy is over six feet in his boots, strong as a young buff'ler an' handsome as a blooded colt.

"Him an' his servant Fergus is seekin' fortune in the West, hopin' to make California and the diggin's in time. They has all their goods an' chattels with them; which ain't much more'n the clo'es they has on—the skirts an' feathers an' things, like's if maybe the young feller has a row with the duke, his father, an' comes away in a hurry.

"But if they don't have no civilized raiment, sech as britches an' the like, Young Roy has along his guns an' an old sword, which the Gila says is called a 'claimer,'* an' a set of them ungodly skirlers they calls bagpipes.

"The young master is some hand with the pipes hisself, but he us'ally leaves the playin' of them to Fergus. Seems this air the custom an' part of the servant's chores. Every time the caravan makes camp an' everything's corralled for the night an' the fires goin' an' the buff'ler or venison turnin' on the spit, Fergus gets out his pipes and blows a piece on them. Never could see much tune in them myself, but I admit they makes a man want to get up an' do something vi'lent.

"WELL," Ringer continued, forgetting the Irishman in his own interest in story-telling, "Fergus useter play them pipes out in the prairies an' cañons. It must ha' scared the buff'ler stiff. Maybe they didn't have to hunt b'ar. Reck'n the critters jest laid down in their tracks an' give up. What it done to them Injuns is right queer by all accounts.

"They comes up on the gallop one day jest as Fergus is gettin' the windbag blowed up. Them reds stops their ponies dead an' sits there starin' while Young Roy's servant plays one of them tuneless tunes that makes yer scalp feel 's if there was a Kiowa knife makin' the magic circle. Then them Injuns turns tail an' makes a hole in the nearest sky-line. Reck'n they thinks it's medicine—big, paleface medicine, though ye never c'n tell what an Injun thinks about anything. Leastways, it ain't a safe guess.

"Anyway the pipes seems to draw them, even if they is scared. They follows the caravan in the us'al way. Young Roy of Arden-Keppel laughs an' says it's the bagpipes they wants to hear. Maybe he's right. Leastways, it gets to be the reg'lar thing for Fergus to get out his pipes an' serenade a hundred or more bucks who'd ride up to jest outside range, all decked up in paint an' feathers; an' there they'd set like wooden dummies on their ponies until Fergus comes to the end of his piece an' lets the wind outen the bag.

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* *Author's Note*—Claymore?

"Thet seems the bit of the performance the Injuns likes best—when he lets the wind die out an' them pipes makes an expirin' noise like eighty-seven dyin' kiotes. Then the varmints gives a yell an' gallops away.

"Some of the traders is a'gin' the pipes, believin' it's them is keepin' the Injuns on the trail. But the others maintains the pipes is —— good medicine if they keeps the reds too amoosed f'r mischief. An' as they ain't always the same reds—or the same kind o' reds—it's clear none of them follows the pipes very far an' then always gives up without attackin'.

"But it ain't over the bagpipes the traders falls out. It's the old story.

"Maybe ye knows, Irish—which is to say ye don't!—that the arrangement them traders us'ally makes when they jines up for protection is that when they gets fifty miles from the Missouri line each trader takes control of his own men.

"Well, there's some fallin' out over the general supervision, an' the upshot is this caravan splits in two. The military escort is sorter up a'gin' a problem—which half to escort without dividin' themselves, which they ain't strong enough to do.

"They finally goes with the bigger outfit after failin' to make a patch-up between it and the smaller, among which is the trader that has Young Roy uv Arden-Keppel an' his servant along.

"Anyway with ordinary luck there warn't much to be afraid of, as there ain't more 'n a few miles between the two caravans all the way to within fifty miles of Point of Rocks. If the smaller caravan is attacked an' c'n hold off the reds a while, the escort ahead c'n hear the shootin', even if they don't see the mess, and ride back.

"But ye know how it is gettin' within hailin' distance of trail's end. The caravan ahead makes Point of Rocks early in the day. They decides to travel on to Wagon Mound and camp there instead. They pushes ahead while the caravan behind slows up, takin' it easy so as to make camp at Point of Rocks, where there's always plenty of water and feed—an' Injuns for jest that likely reason.

"Everybody but Irish knows how Point of Rocks in them days is about the most dangerous spot on the whole Santa Fé Trail. With its big, cold spring gushin' out of the rocks it's jest too good to be healthy. I reckon there's been more ha'r lifted there than anywheres west of the Missouri.

"But the boss of the hinder caravan is a hardhead. It's him that causes the split in the beginnin'. But Young Roy of Arden-Keppel ruther fancies the danger, an' then they've hed luck with them all the way.

"They camps at Point of Rocks—a right nice spot if ye happen to be bald or bought yer ha'r in a store. Along about daybreak them Apaches, jest rises out of nowhere an' begins circlin' an' shootin' an' yellin' like kiotes in moonlight.

"The trader an' Young Roy of Arden-Keppel puts up a great defense. Seems the Scot has been in some real fightin' in Yurrup an' is a soldier by trade. They caches the women an' children and places every passenger that wears britches whar he'll do the most good. They fights like man, an' would ha' beaten off three times their own strength; but they're up a'gin worse 'n that. Them Apaches seems to jump up double for every one they drops. It's as if the whole tribe is out!

"But they fights on, all the time expeckin' to hear the escort pound in from the west an' take the Injuns in the flank an' rear. They ain't dreamin' that the bigger caravan's now forty mile away, well beyond Wagon Mound an' headin' for Taos—the escort jest as keen for trail's end as the traders, they thinkin' the smaller outfit 'll come through all right anyway.

"Well, that's about all the story. Only Fergus comes out of it alive. How? He don't know hisself. He's crazy as a locoed jack-rabbit when Bill Comstock an' the rest of us picks him up wanderin' among the mesquite an' catclaw. Mebbe that's why the Apaches doesn't kill him. They're plum scared of a loco. Then there's the way he's dressed. Maybe they takes him for a sperrit.

"He disremembers everything frum that p'int. When it looks like the jig's up, he uscter tell me, his master calls him to his side.

" 'Fergus,' says Young Roy, 'you an' me will gang oot thegither.' (I don't get the hang of their tongue, but it's something like that.) 'Get on the wagon-tree there, m'lad, an' blaw the pipes for the glory of Scotland an' the McAulays of Arden-Keppel! There's two red arrows on the arms, lad. They're for us—ane for each! An' there's a red cock, spurred proper.

" 'Blaw, Fergus—*blaw!* An' by the hills o' the Gairloch, I'll teach they red devils *this cock is spurred!*'

"THAT'S all," Ringer said after a pause, his voice dropping to a grumble as if he were ashamed of the momentary thrill in his utterance. "I reckon them reds thinks they're up ag'in' the original Fightin' Fiend. They still mentions him as the 'Red Death.'

"I'd like to ha' seen that an' to ha' counted the reds as goes down before that big Scotch claimer. Fergus says his master is the last to fall, an' that's long after every other human is scattered around the shambles inside that corral of wagons.

"In the mean time the Gila keeps on playin' his tune—'Cock o' the North,' he calls it—until Young Roy drops down bristlin' with arrows an' full of lead an' yellin' some Scotch war-cry with his last breath. Then Fergus drops the pipes, jumps down from the wagon-tree, goes headlong through the Injuns, drops on his knees beside his young master, an'——

"He doesn't remember what happens after that. Reck'n he's out of his mind—the way we finds him near Wagon Mound.

"We takes care of him an' he stays with us. He seems to have only one idee at a time—any time; to kill Injuns. He's been doin' it ever since an' has a special likin' for Apaches. He don't bring in no prisoners.

"Aside from that an' them spells when he thinks he hears the ghost-pipes callin', he's as good a scout as ever camped on the Ol' Trail."

There was a marked stillness around the campfire as Ringer ended his tale and silently began to refill his pipe. Then the Irish teamster, who had been listening with his mouth open and his eyes popping, drew a long breath and gasped—

"B' jabers!"

III

THE moon surmounted the grotesque pinnacles to the east, flooding the half-desert land with a bluish-silver radiance.

Between two of the weird rocks that rose blackly against the moon the Gila crouched in a listening attitude.

Whether the sound came from within or without, the sensitive nerves of his ears registered the ghost-pipes as clearly as if a pibroch played on a still night in some silent glen.

"Aye, maister!" he whispered. "I hear ye. I'll tak' toll!"

Despite his age—thirty-three years had passed since that massacre by Point of Rocks—the old Scot dropped almost flat and squirmed nimbly forward until he reached the saddle between the pinnacles. There he lay still and again listened intently.

Again his ears—or the ears of his imagination—caught the sound; distant, vague, ghostly. It seemed to him a little more to the north of west. Below him there was no sign of the thing he sought; nothing but a tumbled mass of boulders and, beyond these, a clear sandy area reaching to another group of bluffs standing up fantastically in the moonlight.

Rising to the full erectness of his six feet two, the Gila descended rapidly from the saddle of rocks, scrambled with amazing agility between or over, the boulders below, gained the open sand and again stopped.

The perpendicular rock "islands" about him either shut off the sound he followed or else the acoustics of that strange labyrinth played tricks with wave-lengths. For a few minutes he was at fault.

"Whaur noo, Young Roy?" he whispered.

As if in answer, a sound—a triple note like the drone of bag-pipes—came faintly through the air, and, as it seemed, *from* the air. Fergus crouched low. There was plenty of time. The greater part of the night was before him. That was well, for the moonlight cried caution. Before dawn he would find his quarry, cut another notch in his gunstock and again smoke his pipe until the ghost-pipes summoned once more.

He had perfect confidence in the upshot. When the ghost-pipes blew down the night wind to his mental ears it meant that somewhere within swift traveling distance Indians lurked; and always they were Apaches. They might lurk anywhere when the pipes did *not* call; but maybe then the shade of Young Roy rested and cried for no toll.

But when the summons did come—

Aye, the Indians were always at hand for his rifle, or his knife, or his bare, strong fingers. The ghost-pipes had never lured him on a fool's errand.

Sometimes he wondered in his half-crazed brain if it was indeed vengeance for which the ghost of Young Roy cried. The lad had never been a whiner in life, but a fair fighter, a generous victor, a good loser. He had not fallen in fair fight; but Young Roy would have called it the fortune of war, no matter what his servant, of lesser earth, termed it.

Was it vengeance? Always the sound had led him unerringly to the spot where Apaches lurked. Ever the advantage had been his—his course directed straight to the expected savage, who took his ease in fancied security, off guard. True, there were always the Indian pickets; but these made Fergus's game the easier.

Just one! That was all that was required as toll each time—just one. In other days a shot had spurted from a bush, or a rock, or some high bluff. A savage had dropped. His fellows had sprung to arms and scoured the surrounding cover. But they never found him they called the Gila.

But rarely now did Fergus shoot. Like liquor to an inebriate, his drug to an addict, the half-crazed Scot's hands thrilled to the soft greasy resistance of a red throat. Sometimes the knife was necessary to equalize the struggle, although he strove to avoid it. But never the rifle-shot—now.

For into his warped brain a new thought had dawned that time he passed up his toll in order that a caravan might be warned. There were women in it, and one little child, new-born. Fergus turned a deaf ear to the ghost-pipes that night and carried the warning.

But later, when there was none to be warned. . . . In the morning the Apache chief found his pickets dead. . . Only their eyes told the story.

Again and again the ghost-pipes had called. They had become still not always when Fergus took toll, but surely when he brought news of danger and saved white lives from savage slaughter. There were even times when the ghost-pipes persisted even after successive nights of stalking and killing, as if the shade of Young Roy of Arden-Keppel could not rest, was not satisfied, or his living Nemesis failed to understand the true language of the message.

Of late years Fergus and the shade had been silent and inactive. But from the time of the Point of Rocks massacre, on through the unsettled years preceding and during the Civil War—when the West was its own law, its own protection—up to the time of the real occupation of the great Southwest territory, ever the ghost-pipes had called in the night; sometimes as far north as Montana, as far south as Old Mexico, eastward by the Missouri and not infrequently on the outskirts of the arid Mohave Desert. Wherever most the Apaches rose in war-paint the pipes wailed and summoned Fergus to his task of personal vengeance.

What he heard, or thought he heard, was unmistakably the voice of the pipes, and these the same reeds he had himself so lovingly fingered many a night by Gairloch, many a night on the emigrant ship, many a night on the plains when the stars blinked in surprize and the painted savages came out to hear the strange, barbaric pibroch.

These pipes were the same that Young Roy had loved—the pipes with the ebony chanter, the hand-carved ivory joints, the chasings of Scottish thistles on the silver mountings—the old family pipes of the McAulays which he and the young master together had learned to play when old Aulay McAulay presented them to his younger son—for the real heir, to the McAulay's disgust, had taken to the fiddle!

Aye! They were the same pipes. Fergus knew it as surely as if he beheld them again, and his eyes looked upon the coat-of-arms graven on the silver mounting of the middle drone—the two arrows in saltire, surmounted by a fesse between three buckles, and the crest a cock spurred proper.

The same pipes. Their voice had become mellow with the triumphs and sorrows of Scotland. They had hailed the bonnie Chevalier when he raised his standard in the Hebrides, shrieked his triumph at Prestonpans, piped him into Holyrood and wailed his sorrow at Culloden.

They had been hidden away through the years of the attainder and brought to light again—and their braw chased thistles polished to brightness—when no longer was it an offense against the House of Hanover to wear the garb and chant the music of Old Gaul.

And in the end they had piped the son of a race of warrior chieftains into the Hall of the Chief of Chieftains—that day by Point of Rocks.

The same pipes; but not the same skilled touch. For nimble had been Young Roy's fingers upon the wild grace-notes. Never had a Highland love-song lilted so sweetly as when he played it. Yet the tunes that now came to the hearing of Fergus were neither sweet nor martial.

They were as the cryings of some perturbed soul shrieking for vengeance—wild, sullen, fierce, implacable ghost-pipes.

IV

FERGUS started alert. A mere breath of air fanned his gray temples. But it gave him the exact direction adown which drifted the faint, droning sound.

"Aye, aye, maister," he muttered. "I hear ye. To the west there, bearin' a wee north. Just breathe on the chanter a bit mair, lad, till I hae my e'e on the heathen. Just breathe on the chanter!"

He stole around the base of the bluff and found himself in a moonlit lane. On the other side of it rose more of the rock "islands" peculiar to the region. The one nearest him was not so precipitious, although higher. He could claw his way up the face of it and from the summit, the sound-waves less obstructed, place the exact location of the game. Already as he cleared the first "island" the voice of the pipes came more clearly.

When he reached the top of the second bluff he lay flat on his belly, his hair bristling beneath his broad sombrero. Yet nothing could he *see* that denoted a savage presence.

Before him stretched the familiar vista of bare sand-patches, areas of cactus, greasewood, mesquite, catclaw and sagebrush, masses of broken boulders, and then again the misshapen grotesquerie of bluff, pinnacle and gashed or eroded chasm.

Yet the pipes came to his mind's ears more distinctly than ever they had done out of the ghostland of his thirty-odd years' hallucination. He found it hard to believe in that moment that they were not real pipes of ebony, leather and silver, gay with tartan streamers and played by fingers of living flesh and bone.

"Ye play wi' an urgent touch the nicht," he whispered. "I hear ye, sir. But eh, lad, ye're sair oot o' practise. Whaur be the fine grace-notes? An' hae ye forgot the auld tunes? I'd ken ye better, maister, if ye played 'Airlie' or 'Nae Luck aboot the Hoose.' Will ye hae forgot 'Cock o' the North'?"

The desert breeze blew again, this time stronger, though still fitful. The drone of the pipes swelled angrily, with a note of summons more peremptory than usual.

Down from the bluff the sinewy old Scot wormed, muttering in his beard. As straight as the nature of the land permitted he headed westward, bearing a point north.

And as he went, ever the drone of the ghost-pipes became louder and more insistent.

HE CAME upon his quarry quite suddenly. After traveling about a mile and coming out on top of a bare rock-ridge, he looked down into a cañon which, hemmed in by precipitous bluffs, formed a roomy *cul-de-sac* with but space enough at the mouth for two mounted warriors to ride abreast through a bending tunnel under a rock-arch.

It was a natural corral, a hiding-place where half a regiment might have rested in roomy security unless it happened to be discovered unknown to its occupants. Thereupon it would become the very opposite—a death-trap.

Fergus' trained eye took it all in at a glance. That part of him which was scout absorbed the situation involuntarily. That part of him which was Scot boiled in a ferment at what he saw.

His scalp crept; his beard bristled; his eyes widened and blazed with fury; and through his teeth came gritting sounds of rage.

Despite all this the old insanity left him on the instant, as if a fog had lifted from his darkened understanding—lifted, never to return.

Now he cursed the bloodthirsty desire of vengeance which had ever clouded his mind when it came to a choice of killing or making a prisoner who might give information of his tribe's plans and movements. Many a time he had stood by and sneered when Leacock or Ringer, or any of the other scouts, had brought in a brave and tried to coerce him into speech. Fergus had needed no help from any Indian to destroy other Indians!

Yet had he listened he might have surmised long years before what was so clearly revealed to him now. Now he recalled having heard—and scoffingly jeered as "Injun superstition"—tales of the powers of Black Kettle, the Apache wizard who, when all others failed, could make medicine that sent forth warriors to victory, turned them into fighting fiends, insensible to pain, fearless of death, impossible of defeat in their own belief and too often victorious through that very conviction of infallibility.

Below him in the *cul de sac* there were as many as three hundred Indians. The teepees were set along the walls of the cañon and formed a long V. Down the center there was a widening avenue between the teepees, and toward the base of it burned, in the middle, a fire.

In front of the teepees were a number of old squaws, but no old men or children or maidens. This was a war-party. Around the fire pranced the bucks, hideously daubed with paint, wearing masks of animals' heads, waving spears, knives, clubs, rifles, tomahawks, and chanting in a subdued pitch the story of their past prowess, their invincibility against the whites and the toll of scalps they would bring back on the morrow.

To the tune of the chant and the pad of moccasined feet on beaten earth, the voices and hand-clapping and drum-beating of the squaws mingled with the musical chink of the dancers' trappings of silver and brass.

"*Nee-tah! Nee-toh!*" chanted the squaws in a flattened minor.

"*Hay-yah! Hay-yoh!* responded the perspiring warriors in hoarse gasps.

But the eyes of Fergus of the Gairloch were fixed on one figure—that of Black Kettle, the medicine-man.

The Apache wizard stood at the apex of the encampment's V. He was a frightsome apparition. His face was blackened with pot-soot. Red and white streaks painted enlargement of his mouth. Great yellow smears were about his eyes, and two horizontal lines of vermilion on his brow. His body was draped with a motley of skins, his head crowned with a pair of buffalo horns, and from each bare arm and from his scrawny neck hung living, squirming, whirring rattlesnakes.

But all this had Fergus seen and sneered at before. The thing that made his blood chill with awe and boil with rage was in the hands of Black Kettle.

The medicine-man did not even know how to hold the thing. The leathern bag, puffed out, stood away at an angle, while the drones stuck out at others, like legs of some gigantic spider, held in relative position only by the old, faded, silken gathering-cord. The once gay tartan streamers drooped listlessly from the peaks of the drones as if feeling conscious of indignity and disgrace.

The mouthpiece of the ancient instrument was bitten between the teeth of Black Kettle, whose puffed face, as he straining blew, streamed perspiration over his paint. In his red hands was the ebony chanter, his untaught fingers on the holes. And the bagpipes that had once blown the glory of the Bonnie Prince emitted a savage wailing that was more horrible than imagination can conceive.

It was the "big medicine" of Black Kettle—the "Fighting Spirit" of the tribe—the revered and infallible fetish of the Apaches.

The dance ended abruptly. Black Kettle gathered up his strange "medicine god" and disappeared within his teepee of mysteries; his work done, his charm spelled. The chief of the band, Yellow Dog, harshly ordered the squaws within, then held council with his warriors about the fire.

By midnight the last embers of glowing greasewood were sanded to blackness and the camp of the savages slept against the fierce activity planned for the dawn.

ON THE bluff overlooking the scene the Gila had lain for two hours his face framed between his hands, his old heart and brain wrought with many emotions and a thousand memories.

The old madness was gone, the old hallucination dispelled forever. Only one thing was clear. His master, Young Roy of Arden-Keppel, was indeed dead—had been dead and his soul at peace these thirty and three years. The pipes he had heard were no ghost-pipes, but the old pibroch in the hands of savages!

At first the disillusion hurt. Then a fierce satisfaction was born. It was not he, Fergus, that was living Nemesis for his master's murder, but the pipes—the pipes of Arden-Keppel! They—and not the ghost of Young Roy—had called in the night, not to inspire savages to battle, but subtly summoning Fergus to their undoing!

And by the hills of Gairloch, this night should honor that summons!

To the shelter of a jagged rock the Gila crept. In its shadow he half rose to his knees. His great, muscular hands came together. And he seemed to pray a while to the God of the Scots. Then he descended from the bluff.

Half an hour later a drab figure, almost indistinguishable from the ground, squirmed toward the entrance of Black Kettle's teepee and disappeared within.

A rattlesnake whirred in the blackness. The medicine-man started up. But before he could find tongue the mouth that opened wide remained open and his tongue, protruding, sagged as a single, powerful hand closed about his throat.

THE moon was past the zenith of its course by one o'clock in the morning when the Gila rose from the brush about a half-mile south from the narrow entrance to the *cul de sac*.

In the shadow of a clump of cactus he sat down and rested. Across his knees lay a disheveled mass of leather, ribbons and ebony pipes touched with stained ivory and tarnished silver.

Tears were streaming down the face of the plainsman who had once been Fergus, henchman of Arden-Keppel. All the pathos and romantic melancholy of his race surged up within him now. His hand lovingly caressed the ravished pipes, and he crooned over them like a mother over a dead child. But it was to the invisible he spoke.

"Rest, Young Roy!" he whispered. "Rest till the Pipes o' Judgment rouse ye. I hae found the bonnie pibroch. If the guid Lord will but spare me till the mornin's mornin' I'll blaw them again for the glory o' Scotland an' the spurred cock o' Arden-Keppel!"

With sudden haste he glanced around him, marked the exact lay of the land and hid the pipes among the cactus, heedless of the spines that tore his flesh.

Then, picking up his long-barreled rifle, he moved silently and with almost incredible swiftness toward the camp of the cavalry detachment.

V

WHEN he had heard as much as the Gila chose to tell him of his night's adventure, Lieutenant Gaillard thought he saw his chance.

The fact that he had but thirty men in his detachment—with the scouts and other attachés, perhaps fifty in all—against three hundred Apache warriors did not daunt him for a moment, but rather whetted his desire to try conclusions at once and win laurels if he corraled or destroyed the predatory band.

It was some disappointment to learn that Geronimo himself was not with these savages. But Yellow Dog was no small fish to net, and the removal of Black Kettle, the tribal wizard, would be a demoralizing blow to the superstitious redskins. As for Geronimo—well, that wily savage was the bane of Crooke's career and was yet to test the wit of his successor, General Miles.

Good enough! thought Gaillard. Better still: According to the Gila the *cul de sac* was a natural fortress, but like most fortresses itself a trap once its security was violated by surprize. Gaillard felt his laurels already. He, with a handful of dragoons, would have taken Yellow Dog, Black Kettle and three hundred Apache braves—a fairly large nail in the coffin of Geronimo the Tiger.

It still lacked two hours of dawn when he dismissed the Gila, bidding him stand by for further orders and in the meantime rouse and summon the second lieutenant, Kroner.

"No bugle—not a squeal!" Gaillard commanded his subordinate when the latter appeared. "Have the men roused and pass the word. No fires! I give you fifteen minutes by the watch."

But had Gaillard been able to look into the Apache camp in that moment he might not have felt so sanguine of success.

A warrior, aroused by a faint sound somewhere around the noon of the moon, had seen a vague figure crawl from Black Kettle's tent. Suspicion alert, he had arisen and followed the trail for some little distance—just far enough to ascertain that it was not the trail of an Indian. Then he had sped back to the encampment, awakened Yellow Dog, rather than cross Black Kettle's mystic circle alone, and related what he had seen and discovered.

Together the warrior and Yellow Dog found Black Kettle dead, his tongue lolling from his mouth. They did not look for the Fighting Spirit. No doubt it was supposed to be an invisible thing save when the wizard materialized it. Anyway no human hands would dare touch it.

That the ghost-pipes had been the object of the intruder's exploit did not occur to them in that moment. One thing was uppermost in their suspicions. There were palefaces at hand.

One of Yellow Dog's scouts presently discovered the cavalry encampment and carried back news of its location and strength. Even as Lieutenant Kroner aroused the troopers by touch and whisper Yellow Dog had his warriors awakened silently and summoned to a council—a council at which the chief prepared a trap which was characteristic, not of an Indian, but a particular Indian—Yellow Dog!

Even as the Apaches, unlike other tribes, seldom took scalps, so their chiefs, while honoring most rules of Indian strategy, allowed themselves to be bound by none. One phase of the genius of Geronimo was that those who were opposed to the Tiger never knew what he would do—until he did it!

And now Yellow Dog, knowing the whites were but a handful in number, designed to trap them in a manner the cavalry scouts would least and last anticipate. If the whites were on guard against ambush they would look for it to be sprung where the ground most favored Indian strategy; certainly not where the ground was best suited to the more open methods of white men.

Therefore, Yellow Dog, choosing from Geronimo's rules reversed, divided his warriors into groups. Fifty manned the tunnel and the arch at the mouth of the *cul de sac*, guarding from above and in front, some ambushing themselves on the inner side. Fifty more spread themselves along the ridges on top of the blind cañon's walls in order to watch and ward against rear or flank attack.

With the main force, about two hundred braves, Yellow Dog himself stole out on the mesa over which Fergus' trail led to the cavalry camp. At a distance of from a quarter to a half-mile from the cañon's mouth Yellow Dog and his company sank down in twos and threes among the brush and cactus.

Five minutes later the moon, now swimming lower down to the south of west, lighted a scene which seemed as desolate of human kind as it was when Vasquez de Coronado first beheld it. The proximity of Indians was always conspicuous by its invisibility.

VI

DOWNING his first impulse to attack at once, Gaillard held off for another hour. If the Apaches were unaware that their whereabouts had been discovered, they would not move before dawn. Any advantage of an attack by uncertain light would accrue to the savages.

Only two miles separated the cavalry from the blind cañon. By four o'clock there would be a first suffusion of daylight—enough to sight a rifle. When his watch pointed to a little after three Gaillard gave the word.

The cavalry advanced at a walk, threading the easiest way through the clumps of cactus and brush, avoiding rocks while taking advantage of their cover when possible. The lieutenant rode his charger at the head of the column. A little in front of him, scouting and leading the way, was the Gila, mounted on a scraggy mule. The other scouts, Leacock and Ringer, ranged ahead, keeping a sharp eye against possible surprize, although none was expected in this comparatively open ground.

The advance was slow, caution and the need of better light the considerations. No one spoke, save in whispers, and every care was exercised to minimize the sound of travel.

Gaillard had the campaign mapped in his mind. Kroner understood his part. Taking a score of his men, Gaillard planned boldly to sound a bugle and charge upon the mouth of the *cul de sac*. He felt sure the Indians would either lie low and defend their fortress or try to steal away up the face of the cañon's walls to the rear. These the Gila had reported not so unscalable as they might appear. He himself had descended from the ridge-top.

To head off any such attempt at escape, Kroner, with ten regulars, Leacock, and as many of the camp hands as could shoot—and they all could—was to repel them from the bluffs. Kroner and his company were to be allowed that spare half-hour to get into the allotted position.

Then, as Gaillard figured the upshot, the Indians, trapped between two fires, would either surrender after a brief exchange of volleys or make a sally through the cañon mouth, which, however, was too small to emit more than two warriors riding abreast at one time. If they attempted the latter desperate move Gaillard's troops would shoot or cut them down as they came out until they either surrendered or again retreated into their fortress, which would now be their trap.

Within a half-mile of the still invisible entrance to the cañon Fergus spoke a word and Lieutenant Gaillard called a halt. Summoning Kroner to his side, he whispered a few hurried, final instructions. A suffusion of rose behind the black pinnacles to the east was prophet of the dawn.

Kroner and his men deployed, taking Leacock and the impressed enforcements with him. Gaillard, sitting his charger, watched with anxiety the detachment circle away, for the sunrise seemed to be traveling upward with disconcerting rapidity.

Not a sound broke the stillness. The mesa lay as silent and motionless, withal colorful, as a painted canvas. Kroner and his company, a gray-blue blur to the west, suddenly wheeled and disappeared among a group of rock "islands" a few points north. Presently climbing, either afoot or mounted, they would complete the half-circle and emerge above and behind the *cul de sac.*

In the mean time Ringer, who had been scouting ahead toward the cañon, brought his mount to a quick standstill and himself glanced suspiciously about him. The Gila grunted and drew Gaillard's attention to the action.

Ringer sat still on his pony, his nerves taut, his every sense strained on the alert. He could see nothing to account for the mistrust which had suddenly *crawled* over him. But—his nostrils twitched like a hound's nosing scent.

Presently Ringer turned his pony's head and came back toward the company. The Gila, watching him, saw no haste in the scout's pace; yet the Scot knew, even before Ringer cast aside subterfuge and broke into a gallop as he yelled, that his comrade had discovered some trap.

Yellow Dog, who had been lying low in the hope that the whites would ride just a little farther into his involving net, saw that alarm was taken and sprang his ambush without more delay. Even before Ringer reached the company, and at his first yell of warning, up from the brush almost within a horse-length of Lieutenant Gaillard rose the straight, tall figure of a brave. His rifle cracked, and a man a little to the officer's rear received in his throat the ball which had zipped between Gaillard's bridle hand and his ribs.

At the same instant cactus, brush and rocks seemed to move, and Indian heads rose like a flock of deer taking first alarm. A volley crashed. Four or five riderless horses dashed about the mesa, snorting.

Meantime Fergus leveled his ancient rifle at the warrior who had fired the first shot. The Gila's shot—the second in the Battle of Blind Cañon—dropped him before the smoke had ceased to curl from the savage's weapon.

The cavalry, taken completely by surprize, nevertheless stood ground and replied with a scattered fire.

The fight was on!

Fight unexpected and with the odds in favor of the redskins. The lieutenant's dream of laurels turned to ashes. His heart was filled with a fury of bitterness, as was Ringer's with a fury of rage that Yellow Dog had counted coup at the scout's own game.

Gaillard glanced wildly about him. His duty to his men was to order retreat; but retreat was impossible. Standing in a circle, breast-high in the brush and pouring in a deadly shower of lead, quite regardless that their own warriors suffered from cross-fire, Yellow Dog's band, crowing mockingly, completely surrounded the small company, half of which was already on foot, the mounts deliberately shot from under them.

Hoarsely Gaillard gave a command, swift execution of which was the only hope of salvage from complete annihilation. The rest of the company promptly obeyed, forming a close circle, dismounting and from an equine barricade firing over the saddles at the closing circle of Apaches.

After that second shot—the one which had taken vengeance for the trooper's life—the Gila had dropped from his mule to the ground and taken cover in a clump of bushes. There now he sat deliberately reloading his old weapon.

But even as Gaillard and Ringer were consumed with fires of rage and bitterness a great burden of self-reproach hung heavy upon the Scot; a realization of part responsibility for this unexpected calamity. Had he held his hand, or had he not left that telltale corpse of Black Kettle, the surprize of the Indians might have been complete.

VII

GAILLARD looked anxiously toward the rock "islands" and the cliffs of Blind Cañon. How far had Kroner progressed when the firing began? If he was more than half-way to his position he would probably hurry the faster, fearing himself late to play his part. If, however, he had surmized something amiss—

"Thank God!" burst from the lieutenant's dry lips.

Out from the rock "islands" to the north of west, coming at full gallop back over the mesa, was Kroner with his ten troopers, Leacock, and a dozen or more of the armed impresses. In a wide circle to the south, the horses straining, leaping and plunging through or over brush and rock, the needed enforcement swept, then swung into the rear of the Indian circle to the south. On they came, yelling as only white men yell—from the lungs and not the throat—and firing low at the painted bodies in the foreground.

The Apaches, having expected their red brothers on the cañon walls to deal with this detachment, and shaken at the first menace to their daring plan of "open" ambuscade, broke on the outer circle. Running widely around the sides of Gaillard's stand, they joined with the ambushers in a deployed line between the whites and the redskin retreat—the mouth of the *cul de sac.*

Kroner and his men rode into Gaillard's corral.

"Shall we charge?" he yelled.

"No. Dismount. Half our mounts are dead. Down your own. Pile the carcasses in a rampart. We'll fight this to a finish."

Then began a contest of marksmanship, the redskins in the brush pouring a fire into the faces of barely thirty surviving whites, who in turn pumped hot lead across a rampart of dead and living horses.

But there was seldom ever an Indian fight in which savages in the open were content to stand the brunt of direct fire and, keeping their ground, return it, no matter what the odds in their favor. They could have rushed the defenders of that horseflesh rampart; yet they were still so confident of complete and easy victory that they did not elect to suffer decimation at least.

The natural Indian craving for cover asserted itself. The warriors suddenly rose as one man and retreated at great speed, running in a crouched animal posture. Then down again they dropped at a distance of two hundred yards nearer the cañon's mouth and reopened fire.

Thrice they did this, until the range was so widened that the fire on both sides was becoming ineffectual.

Gaillard gritted his teeth. What was the game? A ruse to draw the white company out from the rampart of horseflesh? Were they pretending retreat so as to lure the enemy toward the cañon mouth, which, Gaillard surmised, was alive with armed and waiting redskins? For there were not more than two hundred braves in Yellow Dog's company in the open.

Or were they actually planning, despite their advantage of numbers, to retreat to the cañon and escape by scaling the rear walls, beyond which lay a labyrinth of rocky defiles leading to the mountains?

For a moment the lieutenant hung in indecision. To retreat was still out of the question. There were not horses enough left to carry the survivors, even mounted double. Short of miraculous rescue by some other scouting detachment of Crooke's cavalry, they were doomed.

Gaillard knew the temper of his men, and in that moment he knew his own. Better the long chance with a faint hope of turning the tables—somehow—than to be slowly wiped out or captured alive. Better—at least so it bitterly came to him in that moment—that the world should never know what happened than for a single survivor to return with the heroic but none too glorious details.

Rapidly he translated his thought to Kroner, the men listening; for he made no effort to exclude them.

"Are you with me?" he finally said, addressing them all.

They were.

"Then give 'em ——! We may corral them and bid for time while a messenger rides to Crooke. Where's that scout—the Scot who brought us into this mess?"

But although they sang out and called his name time and again there was no response. For a moment a curious expression flitted across the lieutenant's face, but it vanished when the voice of Ringer drawled calmly—

"Reck'n they've got the Gila."

The lieutenant turned and, his hand on

Kroner's shoulder with a sort of fraternal grip, again spoke to the company.

"Boys, if I'm doing the wrong thing you'll at least never live to hold it against me. But I'm doing it because it's our one chance, and a little, by ——! because I know you're with me. Sound the charge if there's a bugle and a bugler left!"

Clear and snappy, the brisk notes lifted as the sun burst out over the pinnacles to the east. To a roaring cheer the men and a few whole horses rose and plunged over the rampart of dead flesh, Gaillard leading with a revolver in his left hand and a cavalry saber swung aloft in his right.

"Give 'em —— !" he yelled.

"Give 'em —— !" came the hoarse echo.

Then again the air was split with a fierce spattering of rifle and pistol shots.

VIII

THE Apaches, momentarily staggered at the unexpected daring of this charge into the teeth of annihilation, fired one scattered volley and retreated, Yellow Dog in the lead, the chief yelling in the Apache tongue and waving his feathered spear toward the cliffs above and beyond the cañon. Either he shrewdly surmised the game or else feared to be cut off or shot down before he, at least, gained the shelter of the arch and the cañon enclosure.

His words and signals were apparently understood. Instantly the savages left to guard the arch and the cañon walls abandoned their posts and came out into the open with a scalp-chilling yell. Like a flurry of bees they settled on the momentarily retreating ranks of Yellow Dog, who then—and not until then—turned with renewed confidence and prepared to wipe out the handful of desperate palefaces.

Again the unequal duel was fought, the deployed lines facing each other at not more than two hundred yards apart.

"Shoot down the rest of the mounts!" commanded Gaillard, his voice splitting. "Pile 'em up! Cover, boys, and fight! Fight, —— you! *Fight!*"

But it availed little. There were but twenty men left all told, and not enough cover for even twelve. A despair of impotence took hold of the gallant but headstrong Gaillard. Had he been alone he would have leaped headlong into the faces of the savages; cut, hewn and shot down as many as came within reach or range, and himself gone down gloriously, insanely fighting.

But he could not bring himself actually to command his men to that mad course. If they threw discipline to the winds and so acted of common impulse, he would be with them—lead them. But——

There came a sudden, strange lull on both sides. A few desultory shots sounded as if too late to catch the unexpected command to cease firing. An astonished and deafening silence then fell, into which crept a queer crescendo moan, like the gathering uplift of some great triple siren.

Gaillard and his men heard the sound, but at first did not see the source of it. The Indians, however, lifted their heads above the covering brush and their painted faces, stamped with utter dismay, seemed all turned in one direction—to the left and rear of the palefaces' last stand.

Swiftly the scout, Ringer, turned his head.

"By the — great — horn — spoon!" he gasped. "Look at that!"

Advancing, head erect, his long hair widly blowing as he marched and blood flowing from a red streak over his left temple, appeared Fergus the Gila, emerging as by magic from a clump of cactus.

Under his left arm was clutched a swollen leathern bag from which angularly spread three great pipes gay with fluttering, faded, tattered, tartan ribbons. His sinewy brown fingers rippled over an ebony black pipe heeled with tarnished silver. The mouthpiece was set between straining, puckered lips, and from Boreaslike cheeks he was blowing "Cock o' the North."

On he came, not toward the desperate whites, but past them and straight into the faces of the savages, the drones of his strange instrument roaring a weird, mixed monotone, the chanter thrilling out one of those slogans that from time immemorial have made men thirst for blood and appalled those who opposed them.

There were those among Gaillard's men who like Ringer, could see no music in the pipes, but not a man among them who had not thrilled to the tradition of the pibroch. Their scalps crept at the drama of it. Something lumped in their throats.

Then as by one impetus their blood rose to the boiling-point. From the throats of white men burst a roar that shook the heart of Yellow Dog.

On the heels of the strange figure of the piper, who increased the time of his tune to the double, raced the survivors of the cavalry company.

IX

FOR a moment the Apaches stood transfixed. What happened to them the savages did not know themselves at the moment.

It may have been the unexpectedness of the apparition, or the belief that their "Fighting Spirit," their "Spirit of the Groaning Voice," had deserted them, had gone over to the side of the white enemy. For surely now it was leading *them*, and as surely its voice was raised in a war-song that was like nothing it had ever played for the red men, even in the hands of the wizard, Black Kettle. And *he* was dead, slain by this very War-Spirit which marched boldly into their faces.

Whatever they might have done in the emergency, with true Indian caution they first ran, seeking cover and counsel within shelter of the cañon.

"At 'em, boys! Give 'em ——!" yelled Gaillard. "Don't let 'em rally. Drive 'em in! We'll hold 'em for Crooke! Blow, ye old haggis! *Blow!*"

And the old haggis, his heart bristling like the hardy thistles whose motto is "*Touch me if ye daur!*" blew regardless of Gaillard, deaf to command, himself to the savages "terrible as an army with banners" as he trod like Nemesis on their flying heels.

He did not even lead the way to the cañon mouth or follow where Gaillard and his men pursued the savages to the very arch. Men had other concerns just then than to watch the apparition further. That apparition presently seemed to march at an aimless tangent to the left and disappear between two great rocks in the gash next to the cañon.

The Indians were again fighting, defending the cañon arch. But it was clear they were in a panic. While the warriors fired upon the palefaces outside and the troopers returned shots from the shelter of fallen boulders, Yellow Dog, safely within, gathered his ruffled eagles about him and held a rapid council. Into it burst an old squaw, who gabbled violently.

"It is the Red Death!" she screamed. "By the Rock Springs many Winters ago! It is the Red Death—come again!"

Even as she spoke the drone of the pipes, dulled a while in the clamor and behind intervening rocks, burst out again—this time high in air seemingly.

The squaw screamed and pointed. Overhead, marching down the top of the ridge on the right side of the cañon's V, reappeared the grotesque fantom. It seemed gigantic against the clear, morning sky.

Then the courage of Yellow Dog completely collapsed. He gave the order to retreat before he realized that that command spelled his immediate doom or future disgrace. If he lived to face Geronimo——

But the rout was on. Yelling, screaming warriors and squaws clawed their way up the crevices and along the ledges of the cañon walls, their one thought to escape that evil spirit and gain the mountains to the north.

Outside, Gaillard, himself with a ball-shattered arm, saw the warriors retreat from the arch entrance. For a moment he hesitated. Then he understood, seeing the tall piper in buckskin appear and plant himself on the top of the arch, still lustily blowing "Cock o' the North."

"Through and in!" Gaillard shouted.

With a victor's yell the handful of whites, taking the last, long chance of a trap, plunged through the short, bending tunnel. But the scene within told them the fight was practically over.

From below they fired at the figures clawing up the cañon walls, not always, alas! distinguishing warrior from squaw. Like slaughtered flies the figures dropped limply to the bottom floor, marksmen picking off as many as they could take time to sight steadily. Those that were left below threw down their weapons, and, cursing, struck at the shrieking squaws.

Ringer, dropped on one knee, was steadily firing at the rock-face before him. Over and behind him the piper still skirled defiance with a note of fierce, joyous victory, the piper's face turned inward to where the epilog of battle was being enacted.

All at once Ringer gave a grunt, swung his leveled rifle to the left and a little higher. His shot came simultaneously with another from the ridge-top.

Simultaneously Yellow Dog spun on his heel and came down into the cañon, his rifle clattering ahead of him. Simultaneously also the voice of the pipes choked and died in a curious caterwaul.

Ringer, turning his head quickly, saw Fergus the Gila slowly subside to his knees.

"BOYS!" cried Gaillard, his voice choked with emotion. "We've won out! We've won out! Corraled half the band, killed a third of it and smashed all of it! Where—where's that Scotchman? Wh-where's that —— haggis-eatin', —— old Scot?"

His voice split curiously and his underlip twitched.

Up on top of the cañon arch Ringer found the Gila, lying like one who, tired, has lain down to rest a while. Over him spread the ribboned arms of the pipes. His fingers still lay lightly, almost caressingly, on the ebony chanter with the heel of tarnished silver.

A dark stain spread over the leathern bag where the ball from Yellow Dog's last shot, puncturing the bellows, had found the great heart of Fergus of Arden-Keppel.

SWEETWATER RANGE

by Lew Sarett

WE WERE loping along in the Sweetwater Range,
When the shadowy hand of sleep
On the blue earth had settled like raven's wings
With a swift mysterious sweep.

Tranquil and dark as a slumbering sea,
The slow black tides of the plain
Washed up to the outriding sentinel buttes,
Washed back to the prairies again.

The valley lay calm as a beaver-pond
When the hunter-moon hangs low,
And the hills were as soft as the velvet sod
Under an antelope doe.

Serene overhead in the dusky blue
A single star through the night
Glowed like a candle held by God
As a friendly beacon-light;

A flame in the window of His vast house
Beckoning out to me—
I could almost see Him peering down
As He waited expectantly.

So I flung Him a couple of friendly songs
As I cantered a lonely mile:
"Swing Low Sweet Chariot," "Old Black Joe,"
"Jordan," and "Beautiful Isle."

For the singing of psalms my voice was raw—
I was never a parson's pet;
And the tremolo wail of a shivering wolf
Made it a strange duet.

But hard on the echoes—from Avalanche Peak,
Where the Yellowrock Cataract spills—
I heard Him sing down to me clear as a bell
In the frosty dawn of the hills.

THE CAMP-FIRE

A Meeting-Place for Readers Writers and Adventurers

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

A REAL mystery back of one of our stories in this issue. Surely, if Mr. Chalmers does succeed in learning the identity of the unknown Scotchman he must pass the word on to Camp-Fire. Just possibly some of our old-timers of the West may be able to throw light on the matter.

Laguna Beach, California.

I am not sure but that the facts behind the story, "Ghost-Pipes" may prove of more interest than my fiction version of the probable happenings. Here is an unvarnished statement of the case:

RETURNING the other day from a hunting trip in the Cuyamaca country of Southern California with Roy Clarkson Colman, the well-known painter of "marines," we happened to stop for a look-over at *Ramona's* marriage-place near San Diego. The lessee of this place is a Mr. Getz, who, detecting the ancestral thistles that slightly garnish my tongue, offered to show me a relic which he thought might interest me, but was "of little local interest." It was something, he said, which he had bought some years before from a former scout of the old Santa Fé Trail.

Judge of my astonishment (to say nothing of racial feelings) when he unearthed a set of very ancient bagpipes to which the once-gay tartan streamers were still attached, although long since faded and pathetically tattered. As I say, the pipes were very ancient, belonging doubtless to the eighteenth century, at least—pipes that may have shrieked defiance of Cumberland's dragoons in many a Scottish glen. They must have been an excellent set when new. Their workmanship and material were of the finest, the chanter being of ebonywood heeled with silver, hand-chased in a beautiful design of Scottish thistles, the drones mounted with silver and ivory, the latter also hand-carved. The windbag was of cowhide (probably from Highland cattle), handsewn, one leathern bag enclosing a second. The inner bag was quite sound, although the outer had suffered from moths and rodents.

THE fact that any of the cowhide was left at all at once told me that these pipes must have been more or less continuously in human hands; that is to say, they could not have been unguarded from rodents for any great length of time. "Where did you get them? Who owned them? How did they get here?" are a few of the questions I immediately fired at Mr. Getz, who was apparently much amused over my poorly suppressed excitement.

"I got them," said Getz, "about ten years ago from an old scout, named Adams, who served on the Santa Fé Trail in the wild days before the final occupation of New Mexico and Arizona. He got them—bought, took or *otherwise acquired* them—from an Indian who said they had been with his people for over thirty years, during which time they had been considered 'big medicine' and almost worshiped by the tribe, whose Medicine Man used them in his business and produced them on strenuous occasions, such as when it was necessary to break a drought or convince the warriors that all they had to do was fight the cavalry and the 'Spirit of the Groaning Voice' would bring many white scalps to the lodge-poles. Unfortunately they seem to have made one big mistake. The bagpipes were big fighting medicine right enough, but they were white man's fighting medicine. After the Apaches were all corralled the old pipes again fell into Celtic hands, for I think Adams was Scotch, or of Scotch descent."

"Yes, yes," I said, "but how did the Indians come by them?"

"Oh, in the usual way," said Mr. Getz. "Attacked a caravan on the Old Trail somewhere about '53, massacred to the last man and—well, these bagpipes were all that was left to tell the tale of what may have happened—what probably did happen. Maybe you, as a Scotsman, can understand their tongue; I can't. Maybe they'll tell *you* what caravan it was, whether the attack was by Apaches, Kiowas; Comanches, Cheyennes or Pawnees, at what point of the Old Trail it took place, who owned these bagpipes, what manner of man he was, what he was doing there, whether he died fighting or blowing his swan-song on the pipes, and just what the Indians thought, anyway, when they heard bagpipes. Speculation on the mystery has entertained me many a night, but I have never been able to arrive at an answer."

WELL—I induced Mr. Getz to sell me the pipes, and I didn't haggle over the price either, even if I *am* Scotch—perhaps *because* I am Scotch and the mute tragedy of these pipes hit me harder than anything I can remember. Before taking away my treasure, which Colman said I carried like a hurt child, I had Getz write, in the presence of Colman, a few lines concerning the transaction. Here they are:

> These bagpipes, sold by me to Mr. Stephen Chalmers, were acquired by me in 1910 from one Adams, former Santa Fé Trail scout. They were captured by Indians from a caravan along the Old Trail in the early fifties, used by the Medicine Man and held in great reverence by the tribe.
>
> (Signed) T. P. Getz.
>
> Ramona's Marriage-Place,
> N. San Diego, Calif.
> December 20, 1920.

In return, Mr. Getz asked me to write him a note (which he intended sending to the local newspapers) concerning my purpose in acquiring these pipes. Part of what I wrote follows:

"... to return them to Scotland, where they belong, or to place them in the hands of the United Order of Scottish Clans of the United States and Canada, through its Royal Tanist, Colonel Walter Scott, of New York, and to be placed by him, and at is discretion, among other relics of Scots pioneers in America."

FOR the rest—for several evenings I have been sitting here in my bungalow among the rocks of Laguna, hobnobbing with the terrific ghost who haunts these bagpipes. With him—whoever he was—I have smoked much tobacco. Through the haze we have come to see and know each other, and I to understand the language of his message. I wrote down the story he told me, and you have it in "Ghost-Pipes."

In cleaning the bagpipes, removing the grime and corrosion from the ebony and silver, I found near the top of the chanter a stencilled name, undoubtedly the maker's.

P (or, possibly, B) Henderson
Glasgow.

On this clue I have gone to work to trace the real history of these pipes and the dead man who owned them. I have enlisted the help of Colonel Scott, of the Scottish Clans, also the editor of *The Caledonian*, also my brother, who lives in Glasgow, Scotland, *The Glasgow Herald*, and such other aids as I could think of toward discovering, if it is humanly possible, the identity and true story of the man who lost these pipes—and probably his life at the same time—on the New Mexican desert seventy years ago.

Who was he? What is the story these pipes could tell?

And if I find any living descendants of the piper of the plains I should not consider these pipes my property for a single instant.—Stephen Chalmers.

LET me very strongly second what comrade Morris Tuttle says:

Boston, Mass.

I am impelled to send a word to Camp-Fire today. An omission of my own is the cause. Monday morning I received word that a close friend of mine had taken the long, last trail toward the setting sun. He had lived a long, full life and was in his eightieth year when he went "west" and the news should have given birth to no surprise, but it left me with a deep regret, not only over the loss of my friend but that I had neglected to make notes of dates and places he has mentioned in the many things he has told me of his comings and goings in the land.

HE WAS in the Civil War for three or four years, discharged once for disability but got back into the ruction again. Spent many years in the West. Knew Flood, Mackay and their contemporaries before they left the ranks of toilers to become the Silver Kings of our land. Had traded with the red men; once lost (with his partner) his wagon train near the Little Rosebud and traveled to a fort (Fetterman, I believe), through hostile territory. Enlisted in the Fenian rebellion to capture Canada and was picked up by a revenue cutter on Lake Michigan and brought back to the States before breaching the neutrality of the United States and John Bull very seriously. Had lived through more or less trouble with the Mormons in Salt Lake City and, in short, had crowded his life to the full with experiences interesting in the extreme. He was one of Our Lady Adventure's well-beloved men children.

I had intended to make notes of various occurrences he had related with dates, etc., knowing they would be of the utmost interest to students in future years. Especially interesting were the everyday incidents related, the manner of life of the rank and file in the "army of occupation," on the frontier. The common things that escape the historian's notice. Wild Bill, Buffalo Bill, Capt. Jack Crawford, and other strong figures of the early days will always stand more or less out into the limelight. The other side, or rather the figures in the background, will soon be lost if the few survivors are not called on for details and notes made.

NOW I would like to beg every reader of the Camp-Fire not to neglect an opportunity to make notes of the experiences of any of the old Adventurers they may be fortunate enough to know. Get these experiences, details, dates and customs down in black and white.—*Peccavi.*—MORRIS TUTTLE.

YOU'LL remember Dr. William C. Robertson telling us how easy it is to become a good marksman. Here is a letter from his collaborator. I can say that Doctor Robertson sent me one of those otter skins and if there was a bullet mark on it I could not find it.

Long Beach, California.

Our friend Honduras Bill is too modest by half in his remarks anent shooting. He is getting me some otter pelts, which must not be damaged, according to his notion. How does he do it? By making the bullet ricochet from below and disemboweling the critter. It's neat. His pelts haven't a bullet mark on 'em—the bullet hits along the cutting line, you see. Bill would be furious if he knew this was going into print, but somebody ought to back up his theories with practical examples. He's the best man to do it, only he won't, so I'll be mean enough to do it behind his back.—H. BEDFORD JONES.

IN CONNECTION with his serial story, "The Doom Trail," here are a few words from Arthur D. Howden Smith. What he says about the decisive influence of the fur-trade struggle on the course of North-American history seems as important as it is interesting.

This comrade of our writers' brigade is such a quiet person and is always so entirely absorbed in whatever job he happens to be on that it always gives me a jolt to remember that he was fighting the Turks when he was nineteen. Some of our old-timer readers will remember his articles setting forth his experiences when he was flitting around in the mountains of the Balkans helping the Bulgarians in their guerrilla warfare against the Turks.

Some of you know him from his books or as Washington, foreign or special correspondent of a New York newspaper, as well as from his stories in our magazine, and within a few months may be hearing of him again in a fight staged here in New York.

Since he's one of the oldest members of our writers' brigade it's been quite a few years since he stood up and introduced himself according to our Camp-Fire custom and a good many of you have joined us since then. That's why I'm talking about one of our writers, which I seldom do. Maybe it would be a good plan if we tried to get all the older members of our writers' brigade to stand up a second time and give an account of themselves for the benefit of the newer members of our circle.

Now as to Mr. Smith's story. It is interesting that a book written by one of the characters in the story is one of the reference books used by the author. Interesting, too, that one of the chief characters, though a historical reality and an important figure, is for some reason never mentioned in the official papers. That might almost make a story in itself.

Brooklyn, New York.

The story is based on fact. There was such a smuggling traffic at that time; the effects of this traffic were as serious as I have indicated; and the Governor and his Council were just as anxious to stop it. Also, they had to meet the opposition of the Colonial element which I have described, and as a matter of fact, there was one big trader, whose name is never mentioned in the official papers which have come to my notice, who was the backbone of the smugglinge nterprise. The attitude and actions of the Home Government in London, as carried out by the Lords of Trade, have been faithfully reproduced.

NOW, as to the Iroquois. In all that I have written I have followed largely Morgan's "League of the Iroquois," an invaluable work, checking it up with Schoolcraft's book, as well as "The Iroquois Book of Rites," Cadwalader Colden's "Five Indian Nations of Canada" and more than a score of contemporary narratives and later scientific volumes. Inasmuch as my chief Indian character was a Seneca, I used the Seneca dialect throughout. Whenever I found the accepted spelling of an Indian word either too difficult to pronounce or, as sometimes happens, phonetically false, I changed it. This liberty has been taken in only a few instances. One which comes to my mind at this moment is "Roy-an-eh," the Iroquois equivalent of Sachem. It is spelled generally "Roy-an-er," which seems to me in the last styllable to slurr the fundamental guttural emphasis in Indian speech.

MAY I emphasize the importance of this story as unwritten history? I consider the episodes of fact it deals with as of prime consequence in influencing the destinies of the continent. The military struggles between the French and English which came afterward were only in the nature of confirmation of the preliminary economic struggle I am describing. World history up to the present day has never adequately appreciated the predominant rôle played by economics in international clashes. Nations do not fight because they hate each other.

There is an economic reason beneath every war. The economic debate between France and England in North America was for control of the fur trade, at that time the most valuable trade in the country's natural commodities. The company which controlled the fur trade must have great advantage over its rival, not only financially but from a military point of view. The French were naturally more sympathetic with the Indians. The English needed all the Indian aid they could get. Once they had the fur trade in their grasp, they were assured of the support of tribes which otherwise would have joined the French. Similarly, their colonists were more prosperous, their population increased and their home-trade flourished.

The English statesmen of that day, in New York at any rate, realized the position. They knew they were jockeying with their adversaries in Quebec for positions in the great military struggle which was certain to eventuate. And the moment they had won, the issue of the last French and Indian War (1756-63) was settled. The genius of a Montcalm and the stupidity of English generals might prolong it; but in the long run the end was inevitable—unless, that is, by some trick the French had been able to recover the economic advantage.—ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH.

ONE of you asked for this poem and I can see why. It has the punch. And it comes from a book that is a collection of other poems with the punch, as the book's title indicates—"Songs of Men," an anthology selected and arranged by Robert Frothingham. It is published by the Houghton, Mifflin Company, Boston, Mass., with whose kind permission we reprint it, and can be secured from them for $1.55. Yes, you can call this an advertisement for the book, if you like. The book deserves it and we don't get paid anything for the advertisement. If you read the poem and the book I think you'll agree with me.

Unfortunately the author is anonymous. Is he, by any chance, among us? He ought to be.

The Little Red God

HERE'S a little red song to the god of guts,
Who dwells in palaces, brothels, huts;
The little Red God with the craw of grit;
The god who never learned how to quit;
He is neither a fool with a frozen smile,
Or a sad old toad in a cask of bile;
He can dance with a shoe-nail in his heel
And never a sign of his pain reveal;
He can hold a mob with an empty gun
And turn a tragedy into fun;
Kill a man in a flash, a breath,
Or snatch a friend from the claws of death;
Swallow the pill of assured defeat
And plan attack in his slow retreat;
Spin the wheel till the numbers dance,
And bite his thumb at the god of Chance;
Drink straight water with whisky-soaks,
Or call for liquor with temperance folks;
Tearless stand at the graven stone,
Yet weep in the silence of night, alone;
Worship a sweet, white virgin's glove,
Or teach a courtesan how to love;
Dare the dulness of fireside bliss,
Or stake his soul for a wanton's kiss;
Blind his soul to a woman's eyes
When she says she loves and he knows she lies;
Shovel dung in the city mart
To earn a crust for his chosen art;
Build where the builders all have failed,
And sail the seas that no man has sailed;
Run a tunnel or dam a stream,
Or damn the men who financed the dream;
Tell a pal what his work is worth,
Though he lose his last, best friend on earth;
Lend the critical monkey-elf
A razor—hoping he'll kill himself;
Wear the garments he likes to wear,
Never dreaming that people stare;
Go to church if his conscience wills,
Or find his own—in the far, blue hills.

He is kind and gentle, or harsh and gruff;
He is tender as love—or he's rawhide tough;
A rough-necked rider in spurs and chaps,
Or well-groomed son of the town—perhaps;
And this is the little Red God I sing,
Who cares not a wallop for anything
That walks or gallops, that crawls or struts,
No matter how clothed—if it hasn't guts.

AS TO whether the African elephant has become extinct. A word from one of our writers' brigade in reply to a question from another:

Montclair, New Jersey.

Though I must plead guilty to not having followed the Camp-Fire custom of standing up and speaking out in meeting on the occasion of my first appearance in the first June issue, please do not think it was because of lack of appreciation. My adventures have been limited to those of a newspaper correspondent in France and in a jaunt into Vienna and Berlin a couple of weeks after the armistice, and to some seven months through South Africa from the Cape to the Belgian Congo, where unfortunately two members of our party (the Smithsonian African Expedition) were killed in a railroad accident—and where I came so close to a similar fate as to make it a rather uncomfortable adventure.

IT IS a recollection of Africa that leads me to write now—for I have just come across a copy of *Adventure* a couple of months old and in the Camp-Fire I noticed a letter from Mr. L. Patrick Greene, bringing up the question whether the African elephant has lately become extinct.

May I offer this answer? That the African elephant not only is not extinct, but the Government of Cape Province has come to the very definite and well-grounded conclusion that it never will become extinct.

In half a dozen articles printed in NEA papers late in 1919, I described the organized campaign undertaken by the Cape Province Government in June of that year to exterminate a herd of from one hundred and fifty to two hundred wild elephants in the Addo Bush, an area about sixteen miles long and eight miles wide covered with a dense bush growth that made it literally a thorn jungle. Of course, most of the elephants in Africa are in the central part, largely in British East Africa, Uganda and Nyasaland. The march of civilization drove them north, but the small group in Addo Bush were left the last survivors, living surprizingly within thirty or forty miles of the city of Port Elizabeth and within ten miles of the Indian Ocean.

THE extermination campaign was ordered because of the protest of farmers. The elephants in time of drought left the bush seeking water. They made for Sunday River and because the Government had been witless enough to allow farmers to take up land between Addo Bush and the river, the elephants naturally did damage to fences; and of course they joyfully raided the dams the farmers had built to conserve water. Why should they go on to Sunday River when the farmers placed water conveniently in dams?

In spite of much protest from the scientific world and sportsmen, the Cape Province Government put into effect its plan for extermination. Although such a great hunter as the late Frederick Selous examined Addo Bush and declared nothing could be done—that the farmers, not the elephants, would have to move—the Government hired Major Pretorious, famous as a hunter and war scout in the East African campaign, to exterminate the elephants.

I LIVED at Major Pretorious' camp in Addo Bush in September, 1919. At that time he had killed just ten elephants—that is, from June to September—and had captured two baby elephants. Also he had revised his earlier estimates and decided it would probably take two years instead of one year to exterminate them. While I was at the camp he killed two elephants and captured the two I have spoken of. In the ensuing month he killed no more. When I left Africa the following January he had made very little progress. The thorn jungle was too thick; all the advantages were on the elephants' side; only one person could hunt at one time; the danger was all on the hunter's side—and in the case of elephants there is a very considerable danger, greater than in the case of any other animal hunters will tell you.

Some months later I heard from South Africa that the Cape Government had finally become convinced extermination was impossible, After traversing Addo Bush with Pretorious, as I did, supplemented by information gathered from my scientist companions and from hunters I met in various parts of Africa, I am quite sure that particular herd of elephants will not become extinct. Major Pretorious killed a number of them, but by no means all.

MR. GREENE said he read somewhere that the British Government had suspended the protection given elephants. I do not think such protection ever was suspended. Very great restrictions have been placed on the hunting of elephants in all provinces and protectorates. In Nyasaland a license to shoot four elephants costs three hundred dollars and no elephant with tusks weighing less than eleven pounds may be killed. In British East Africa and Uganda special licenses are required to hunt elephants. The license costs one hundred and fifty dollars for two elephants, and no more than two may be killed every twelve months; nor may female elephants when accompanying their young be interfered with or the young shot or captured without special license.

Elephants are still in Africa, and one need go no farther than Addo Bush, in the heart of South African civilization, to obtain plenty of thrills—the sort one might expect only in Central Africa.—EDWARD M. THIERRY.

Adventure Will Be Published Three Times a Month Beginning in September

THE readers' vote on whether to issue our magazine oftener than twice a month resulted as follows:

To issue oftener	70%
To remain as is	30%

The greatest number of votes was in favor of issuing four times a month—that is, once a week. Here is the proportion:

4 times	43%
3 times	27%
	70%

That seems to us a pretty decisive vote for more *Adventure*. There are several points to be considered. Most of you gave additional help by stating reasons and by raising various questions. One very pronounced note running through your vote was that there should be no increase in quantity if it entailed any loss in quality. We in the office agree very emphatically on this point. And we are convinced that we can not now issue *Adventure* four times a month without seriously lowering the quality. It seems to us a perfectly sound supposition that none of our readers wants the quality of the magazine lowered. Also, there is the fact that 57% voted against four times. That settles the four times a month, the once-a-week idea. But, believe me, the enthusiasm and loyalty of the 43% who voted for it is appreciated.

That leaves 70% voting for an increase. Since to increase to four times is impossible, the only course open is to issue three times a month. Can it be done without lowering quality?

We in the office believe that it can. I'll not go into details or try to prove it in advance by talking about it. The real test can't come until the magazine is actually issued three times instead of two. But if we did not feel we could meet that test we'd be very foolish to make the attempt, for we would lose by it if quality were not maintained. Since we are willing to venture the magazine's financial interests on our very thoroughly considered judgment on this point, we feel justified in asking you to venture your interests as readers on our judgment. We are not infallible, but said judgment is the best we have and we feel secure in it. Remember that your interests and ours are the same in this matter.

Well, then, three times a month it is. And here's luck to it. The change goes into effect with the October issues, out in September, and they will appear on the 10th, 20th and 30th of the month.

As to any change in quality under the new plan, I leave that to your judgment without a worry. I'm not going to make any claims in advance beyond saying that I'm eager to have those three-times-a-month issues go into your hands for appraisal.

So be on the lookout September 10, September 20, September 30, and on the 10th, 20th and 30th of following months—with due allowance for our short friend February. I'm glad we're to meet that much oftener around the Camp-Fire.

HERE'S a thirsty sort of talk from a new member of our writers' brigade who follows Camp-Fire custom and introduces himself along with his first story in our magazine:

Buffalo, New York.

Dear Camp-Fire: Your letter inviting me to join was so fine that I simply had to take it around and show it to all the white-collar guys and the dock-wallopers and the lake sailors that I know in this big fresh-water port of Buffalo. Most of them are readers of *Adventure* and, consequently of "Camp-Fire." The congratulations that ensued involved to some degree the accompanying form of fraternization that makes the rough-neck so lovable. There is one fact that I have ascertained in this connection: that is that Mr. Volstead never could be elected president of a dockwallopers' or a lake sailors' organization.

Now I am back banging my typewriter and feeling fine.

WELL, as you express a wish to learn what kind of a bird I am, I may as well come across with the goods, I have not hunted the tiger or the anthropophagus in their native haunts, but I have bagged a few ideas about men in this world, and that's what I've been after.

I was hatched in a little burg called Trenton, Canada, on the shores of the Bay of Quinte, which is an arm of Lake Ontario situate almost opposite the town of Rochester, New York. From the harp part of me came a natural appreciation of the beauties of poteen. The lime-juicer end of me contributed a perfectly natural regard for ale and stout. The New York State Dutch part of me has always tried to keep peace between the other two scrapping elements; but even from the estimable Knickerbocker, I must make the sorrowful deduction, descended the proclivity toward beer and schnapps that I have always betrayed.

AS A youth I was so lazy that I certainly would not have hiked far from the family porridge-pot had it not been for a consuming curiosity to acquaint myself with the various brewed, fermented and distilled beverages that delectate the nations of the Earth. Accordingly I may as well state frankly that to Mr. J. Barleycorn I am indebted for my wandering tendencies and, therefore, for such adventures as I have had. These have been accruing over such a period of years (I am an old bird—forty years old come next October) that I couldn't even start to catalog them in detail.

In a general way, I will state that I have soldiered, sailed (salt water and Great Lakes), railroaded, hoboed, lumbered, dock-walloped, gandy-danced, etc.

OF LATE years I have been much in the society of the rough-neck. Now the rough-neck and the white-collar guy have at least one thing in common—they are certainly both human beings. I appreciate the good points of both and it is a toss-up among which class of them I have lived the greater part of my life. There is just enough hereditary animosity between the two to make them good friends after they learn each other. I hope the harp and lime-juice parts of me will soon sign an armistice so I can settle down. It seems to be more difficult for them to get together than the white-collar guy and the rough-neck.

THE story-writing bug has been itching me for thirty years. I haven't been able to squelch him yet. Maybe some day I'll get old enough and have sense enough to train him into a regular specimen.

Outside of this bug that I have I consider myself mostly human, like anybody else. I sleep in a bed, go to bed most every night, get up every morning and eat food and wear clothes every day. I am shamelessly addicted to the oxygen habit. For exercise or recreation I play the piccolo and typewriter, paddle a bark canoe, chop down trees—any old thing. My personal idiosyncrasies include shaving my own face and smoking my own cigars. Likewise, occasionally, when opportunity offers, I sometimes—but I'd best be careful. These be dangerous days.

Hoping to get better acquainted and at the same time acknowledging my indebtedness to Camp-Fire for many interesting hours in the past.—Max Bonter.

VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES FREE TO ANY READER

These services of *Adventure* are free to any one. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you **read and observe the simple rules,** thus saving needless delay and trouble for us. The whole spirit of the magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we can help we're ready and willing to try. **Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.**

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application*. We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send you, *post-paid*, the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything. Give same data as for pasteboard cards. Holders of pasteboard cards can be registered under both pasteboard and metal cards if desired, but old numbers can not be duplicated on metal cards. If you no longer wish your old card, destroy it carefully and notify us, to avoid confusion and possible false alarms to your friends registered under that card.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied. Unclaimed mail which we have held for a long period is listed on the last page of this issue.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located a very high percentage of those inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

The Boston Magazine Exchange, 109 *Mountfort St., Boston, Mass., can supply* Adventure *back through* 1918, *and occasional copies before that.*

WILL BUY: Vol. 1 to vol. 10 complete. Must be in good condition. C.O.D.—Address P. Weydig, 406 West 14 St., New York City.

WILL SELL: Feb. 1914 to Aug. 1919. July 1916 and Sept. 1917 are missing. Seventy-four copies in all. Best offer.—Address O. B. Eckley, 2025 East 1st St., Los Angeles, Cal.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

Camp-Fire Stations

In their homes or shops some members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to—maintain Stations where wanderers may call and receive such hospitality as the Keeper wishes to offer. The only requirements are that the Station display the regular sign, provide a box for mail to be called for and keep the regular register book. Otherwise Keepers run their Stations to suit themselves and are not responsible to this magazine or representative of it. List of Stations and further details are published in the Camp-Fire in the first issue of each month.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *un*stamped envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Addresses

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. First suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address Wayne Eberly, 519 Citizens Bldg., Cleveland, Ohio.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure.")

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

1. ★ Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Ports, trade, peoples, travel. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

2. The Sea Part 1
BERIAH BROWN, Seattle Press Club, 1209 Fifth Ave., Seattle, Wash. Ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting, small-boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks. (*See next department.*)

3. ★ The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Questions on the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire go to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; river, lake and road travel; game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs, and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2
HAPSBURG LIEBE, Orlando, Fla. Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, N. and S. Carolina, Florida and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Me. Maine. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

7. Middle Western U. S. Part 1
JOSEPH MILLS HANSON (lately Capt. A. E. F.), care *Adventure.* The Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas. Hunting, fishing, travel. Early history of Missouri Valley.

8. Middle Western U. S. Part 2
JOHN B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Missouri, Arkansas and the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big-timber sections.

9. Middle Western U. S. Part 3
LARRY ST. JOHN, Saugatuck, Mich. Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota and Lake Michigan. Fishing, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, clamming, early history, legends.

10. Western U. S. Part 1
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

11. Western U. S. Part 2 and Mexico Part 1 Northern
J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 West 10th St., Austin, Tex. Texas, Oklahoma, and the border States of old Mexico—Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, natives, hunting, history, industries.

12. ★ Mexico Part 2 Southern; and Lower California
C. R. MAHAFFEY, Apartado 168, Mazatlan, Sinaloa, Mexico. Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, natives, business and general conditions. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

13. ✠ North American Snow Countries Part 1
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Height of Land and northern Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. R'y); southeastern Ungava

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✠(*Enclose addressed envelope with 3 cents in stamps NOT attached*)

and Keewatin. Sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit. *(Postage 3 cents.)*

14. ✠ North American Snow Countries Part 2
HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont., Canada. Ottawa Valley and southeastern Ontario. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping, aviation. *(Postage 3 cents.)*

15. ✠ North American Snow Countries Part 3
GEORGE L. CATTON, Tweed, Ont., Canada. Georgian Bay and southern Ontario. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing. *(Postage 3 cents.)*

16. North American Snow Countries Part 4
T. F. PHILLIPS, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn. Hunters Island and English River district. Fishing, camping, hunting, trapping, canoeing, climate, topography, travel.

17. North American Snow Countries Part 5
ED. L. CARSON, La Connor, Wash. Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

18. North American Snow Countries Part 6
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Alaska. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, backpacking, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

19. ✠ North American Snow Countries Part 7
REECE H. HAGUE, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada. Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and northern Keewatin. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel. *(Postage 3 cents.)*

20. ✠ North American Snow Countries Part 8
JAS. F. B. BELFORD, Codrington, Ont., Canada. New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and southeastern Quebec. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper industry, water-power. *(Postage 3 cents.)*

21. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 632 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. Customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

22. Central America
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure*. Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, language, game, conditions, minerals, trading.

23. South America Part 1
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure*. Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile. Geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

24. South America Part 2
P. H. GOLDSMITH, *Inter-American Magazine*, 407 West 117th St., New York, N. Y. Venezuela, the Guianas, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentine Republic. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, natives, languages, hunting and fishing.

25. Asia, Southern
CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, 1315 Josephine St., New Orleans, La. Arabia, Persia, India, Tibet, Burma, western China, Borneo. Hunting, exploring, traveling, customs.

26. Philippine Islands
BUCK CONNOR, 5444 Hollywood Blvd., Hollywood, Calif. History, natives, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, commerce.

27. Japan
GRACE P. T. KNUDSON, Castine, Me. Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

28. Russia and Eastern Siberia
MAJOR A. M. LOCHWITZKY (formerly Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), care *Adventure*. Petrograd and its province, Finland, northern Caucasus, Primorsk district, island of Sakhalien. Travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

29. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, Carmel, Monterey Co., Calif. Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, Niger River to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora, tribal histories, witchcraft.

30. Africa Part 2 Morocco
GEORGE E. HOLT, Frederick, Md. Travel, tribes, customs, history, topography, trade.

31. Africa Part 3 Tripoli
CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, 1315 Josephine Street, New Orleans, La. Including the Hoggar Tuaregs. Hunting, exploring, traveling, customs.

32. ✠ Africa Part 4 Portuguese East Africa
R. G. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc. *(Postage 3 cents.)*

33. ★ Africa Part 5 Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East Africa, Uganda and the Upper Congo
CHARLES BEADLE, Ile de Lerne, par Vannes, Morbihan, Brittany, France. Geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, adventure and sport. *(Postage 12 cents.)*

34. Africa Part 6 Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal and Zululand
CAPTAIN F. J. FRANKLIN, 40 South Clark St., Chicago, Ill. Climate, shooting and fishing, imports and exports; health resorts, minerals, direct shipping routes from U. S., living conditions, travel, opportunities for employment. Free booklets on: Orange-growing, apple-growing, sugar-growing, maize-growing; viticulture; sheep and fruit ranching.

35. ★ New Zealand and the South Sea Islands Part 1
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. New Zealand, Cook Islands, Samoa. Travel, history, customs; adventure, exploring, sport. *(Postage 8 cents.)*

36. South Sea Islands Part 2
CHARLES BROWN, JR., 213 E St., San Rafael, Calif. French Oceania (Tahiti, the Society, Paumoto, Marquesas); Islands of Western Pacific (Solomons, New Hebrides, Fiji, Tonga); of Central Pacific (Guam, Ladrone, Pelew, Caroline, Marshall, Gilbert, Ellice); of the Detached (Wallis, Penrhyn, Danger, Easter, Rotuma, Futuna, Pitcairn). Natives, history, travel, sports, equipment, climate, living conditions, commerce, pearling, vanilla and coconut culture.

37. ★ Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, Sydney Press Club, 51 Elizabeth St., Sydney, Australia. Customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, history. *(Postage 5 cents.)*

WEAPONS, PAST AND PRESENT

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers ammunition and edged weapons. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district in question.)

A.—All Shotguns including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

B.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers including foreign and American makes. D. WIGGINS, Salem, Ore.

C.—Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800. Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheel-lock and snaphaunce varieties. LEWIS APPLETON BARKER, 40 University Road, Brookline, Mass.

FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and advice; live bait; camping outfits; fishing trips.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines, Porto Rico, and customs receiverships in Santo Domingo and Haiti, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dept. of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union may be called upon for general information relating to Latin-American matters or for specific data. Address L. S. Rowe, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For R. C. M. P., Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Comm., Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

★ *(Enclose addressed envelope with 5 cents—in Mr. Mills' case 8 cents and in Mr. Beadle's 12 cents—in stamps NOT attached)*
✠ *(Enclose addressed envelope with 3 cents in stamps NOT attached).*

Canoeing Ontario's Streams

THIS is a two-seasons trip; at the beginning of the second season you pick it up where you left off at the end of the first. Not a bad idea; eh?

Question:—"My chum and I have an 18-foot motor-equipped canoe in which we can cover 50 miles a day easy cruising.

We are planning to start from Rouse's Point, New York, and head for the St. Lawrence River; and from that point on I would like to have a few suggestions as to the routes. I have thought to cover about five hundred miles, leave the canoe at our stopping-point and return to New York by rail, continuing the trip for another five hundred miles next year.

In framing your answer please consider these points: We would like wild country, where we will not bother any one or be bothered in turn, yet we must consider the gas question as it is impractical to carry more than a one-hundred-fifty-mile supply. Long portages are very difficult with our heavy outfit, and we must end our trip at some place that is near a railroad and yet leaves us in a good position to make another good-sized trip next year.

As an example of what I have in mind, a small-scale atlas shows a tributary of the Ottawa River approaching within what I should judge to be ten or fifteen miles of river running into Lake Nipissing. I had considered running up the Ottawa River and having our outfit hauled within navigating distance of Lake Nipissing and then to Georgian Bay on Lake Huron. Of course, I have no way of knowing just what possibilities there are of making the connection between the river and the lake; but the above is what I have in mind, and any information you may give me will be greatly appreciated.

Last Summer we went up the Hudson River from New York City to Troy and then by canal to Lake Champlain, and we certainly had a fine time camping by the waterside at night. We avoided towns entirely except for supplies. This year we are looking for a wilder trip."—R. FLINTOFT, Mount Kisco, N. Y.

Answer, by Mr. Moore:—If you have a heavy outfit I wouldn't advise you to go up the Ottawa River. From the mouth to Mattawa there are innumerable rapids, many very long, which means too much portaging.

If I were you I would come to Cape Vincent, N. Y., instead of Rouse's Point; then, taking the north shore of Lake Ontario, come into the Bay of Quinte, pass Deseronto and Belleville and go on to Trenton. From Trenton go up the Trent River to Campbellford, through Rice Lake, the Ottonabee River, into Clear Lake, Stony Lake, Buckhorn Lake, Pigeon Lake, Sturgeon Lake, Canoe Lake, Balsam Lake, the canal to Lake Simcoe, up Lake Couchiching, the Severn River, and out to Georgian Bay. Having reached the bay, you could cruise at will, take in the many side trips available and leave your canoe at Parry Sound for the next year.

Next year you could leave Parry Sound, go north to the mouth of the French River, east to Lake Nipissing and the connection to the Ottawa and down the Ottawa—a stream much easier to descend than to ascend.

You will have to go through a dozen or more locks on the Trent trip, but you will see country from the tamest at the beginning to the wildest at the end; you will bother nobody, else it be the lockmasters who are paid for being bothered; nobody will bother you. Your gasoline supply will be very readily replenished along the route.

Reaching the Severn River, in our famed Muskoka District, you will feel that you have been well repaid for the trip—a trip which I understand from a young man who made it last year entails practically no portaging at all.

If you should make this Trent trip, drop in and see us, or let me know in time and I will go down the bay to meet you.

Put at least five cents postage on all letters addressed to "Ask Adventure" editors who live outside the U. S. Always enclose at least five cents in International Reply Coupons for answer.

Tahiti

IT'S a fine little place for the visitor with money; and no place at all for the wanderer with empty pockets:

Question:—"Kindly give me all dope on the island of Tahiti.

1. What group of islands is the island of Tahiti in?
2. What direction is it from Frisco, and how far?
3. What are the living conditions there at the present time?
4. Could one get work there, and what kind? I can operate any type of sewing-machine made; have done riveting, holding-on, drilling, reaming, short knife cutting; leather-belt pressman; fairly good meat-cutter; four years of machine-shop work; drove a tin can two years as cook in the Air Service; painting almost anything.
5. When does the harvest season begin in the West, and in what State? I intend to follow up the harvest this Summer and then intend to work or beat my way to Tahiti from Frisco.
6. Can this be done?
7. Would you advise me to take a pal along?"—"ROVER," Philadelphia, Pa.

Answer, by Mr. Charles Brown, Jr.:—I am taking up your questions in the order that you put them to me.

1. Tahiti is in the Society Islands.
2. 3,360 miles southwest of San Francisco.
3. The living conditions are very good. One can live out in the districts of Tahiti for as low as $20 American a month. In Papeete, the only large village on the island, it can be done European fashion for $40 a month, this including hotel expenses, laundry and other incidentals. Which is because it is a French island.
4. I would not advise you to go to Tahiti with the hope or expectation of finding work. Wages in Tahiti do not amount to anything at all. The trading-houses have brought up their own men, French and Tahitian, who know their peculiar game from A to Z. The same holds true for mechanical work.

In fact, one must speak French or Tahitian in order to hold his own down there. I know of any number of men who found themselves stranded in Tahiti for want of work.

Natives and Chinese work the vanilla and coconut plantations. Here again you would experience great difficulty in being taken on. And you would not want to work for what a Tahitian or a Chinaman is given.

5. Write to "Ask Adventure" expert, Mr. E. E. Harriman, 2303 W. 23rd Street, Los Angeles, Calif., for information on the Western harvest season.

6. I do not know how you can work your way to Tahiti. Nor do I know how you would overcome certain passport technicalities were you to remain on the island after working your way there.

7. I would not take any pal to an island where my chances of securing employment would be as slim as yours will be in Tahiti.

If you will take my advice, you will not have any occasion to cuss out Tahiti and its French administration.

Prospecting in Baja California

THE minerals are there, right enough; but the difficulty is in getting them out:

Question—"As you are mentioned in *Adventure* Magazine as an authority on the Lower California country, would like to ask you the following, as I am thinking of taking a prospecting-trip through that part.

1. What is your opinion of such a trip?
2. Are the natives hostile to Americans?"—JOHN P. WADE, Detroit, Mich.

Answer, by Mr. Mahaffey:—The peninsula of Baja or Lower California is about 750 miles long and from 30 to 150 miles wide, the widest part being along the border; the northern part being similar to the southern part of California. Rocky mountains and barren hills predominate, with stretches of desert, especially along the coast of the Gulf of Cortez, or California, the western side being better watered than the east, and dotted with fertile valleys, among them being San Quentin, Guadalupe, Vallecitos, Las Palmas, Rosario, San Telmo, and many others. The southern part of the peninsula is very fertile where water can be obtained for irrigation, with a sub-tropical climate, dates, sugar-cane and other tropical crops being grown. The climate is very good, with the exception of the hot stretches of sandy desert. Taken as a whole the entire peninsula is an arid and semi-arid region.

There are several fine harbors, Magdalena Bay being the best, but owing to a desert back country it is of no importance. The principal exports are fish, guano, wheat, fruits, and copper from the El Boleo mines at Santa Rosalia, across the gulf from Guaymas, Sonora. The exports for the entire peninsula in 1919 were from the southern and western part $109,356 and from the irrigated section of the Imperial Valley lying in Mexico $8,531,970, mostly cotton, cotton-seed and hides.

The same geological formation exists the entire length of the peninsula. There is a wide granite belt, with intrusions of porphyry, andesite and other rocks. Belts of slate and shales parallel the granite. There are several extinct volcanoes and much lava and other volcanic formations along the west coast. The country is rich in gold, silver, copper, lead, zinc and iron.

Magnesite is shipped from Magdalena Bay. The Mexican onyx quarries near Santa Catarina are the largest in the world. An immense surface deposit of iron near San Isidro gives much promise.

Since 1911 mining has been on a decided decline, the one exception being at Santa Rosalia, where the El Boleo Company, a French outfit, has produced steadily and successfully for a number of years. This company has its own smelter and operates its own ships, four, being the *Providencia*, *Jim Butler*, *Korrigan II* and *Korrigan III*. With the return of normal conditions and proper guarantees this region will be most attractive for mining investments, for there are abundant surface indications and other showings that in Lower California important ore-deposits await the prospector's pick.

Considerable exploration for oil was done in 1910; certain concessions were granted, and some geological surveys made, but no drilling operations were conducted. More active prospecting is expected, and Canadian interests are reported as planning to drill near Rosario.

There is no readily accessible timber on the peninsula, but in the higher altitudes back from the coast there are immense pine forests. These will not be available until railroads are built. There are no sawmills, and the small amount of timber used is brought from the U. S.

No water-power is utilized although several streams—notably the Santo Domingo River, which falls 4,000 feet from San Pedro Martir Mountain—are capable of developing much power. It is inevitable that some time in the future hydroelectric power-plants will be erected on these streams. The more important of these streams have been nationalized.

At one time about 50,000 head of cattle were grazed in the northern district; but this number has been reduced to less than 20,000 head. The largest cattle-owners are Americans, and they are steadily retrenching. It is claimed that 300,000 head of cattle could be grazed in this district.

The manufacturing industry is negligible, there being only a few small plants, three flour-mills, one in San Quentin; and a small tannery in Ensenada and a larger one in La Paz operate on native hides. There are several small sugar-mills near La Paz, San José del Cabo and Mulege.

Poor highways have hindered the development of the section and accentuated its isolation. There are no railroads with the exception of two loops of American roads which loop into Mexico to obtain better terrain. A large part of the territory is inaccessible except on foot, or at best with pack-mules or burros, and the few good roads are used mainly for passenger traffic, there being an auto stage-line from Ensenada to Tia Juana, at the border.

Most of the trade is sea borne, two American steamers calling monthly at Ensenada and La Paz with small coasting service from Mazatlan and Guaymas to La Paz, Santa Rosalia, Mulege and other small ports. There is telegraph service from Ensenada to Tia Juana, San Quentin and Mexicali, and two wireless stations—all controlled by the Government. No express companies have service in Lower California.

The population of the region is about 64,000; 25,000 being in the Mexicali district, and 32,000 in the south, around La Paz, the population in the middle part being scattered and scarce. The American population is about 300, most of those having interests in the Imperial Valley living on the U. S. side of the border in Calexico.

If you will write to Mr. David Goldbaum, Ensenada, for a map of the district I am sure you will be able to use it. I think they cost $1, but you had better write him to find out. Reliable maps are scarce, as the entire region is almost unknown in the U. S.

On account of the little development and lack of communications it seems to me that this region is more of a rich man's proposition, as there are no available smelters and only very rich ore would pay carrying on burros to the coast. Most of the gold is free milling, and in the early 80's there was quite a boom in the northern part, a rich strike being made at Alamo, about 60 miles southeast of Ensenada.

There are many old deserted mines in the Alamo section, and the entire country was combed over for placers. Half a million in gold was taken from placers southeast of Mexicali in the Cocopa Range, and the native ranchers wash out quite a bit of gold when they can get water. The Juarez placers, southeast of Campo, on the border, are quite extensive, 20 x 25 miles, colors being found with water, but mostly it is a dredge or steam-shovel layout.

Personally if you are going to prospect I would suggest the country back of Mazatlan, from the line of Sonora south to Tepic, especially along the south line of Sinaloa and north line of Nayarit. The idea is, what would you do with a prospect after you found it? Supplies are hard to get, and they would be more easily obtained here. Of course you will have a fine time, see some fine country and so forth; but I suppose you are not prospecting for fun.

There is a fine book published about this section, in fact the only one worth anything, called "The Mother of California," published in San Francisco. Ask your bookseller to get it for you, and from it you can get a fine idea of the history, etc., of the section.

In case you want to make the trip drop me a line and I will be able to give you some good ideas as to outfit, etc.

The people are as a rule friendly to Americans; many are half-and-half American and Mexican. However, it pays to watch your camp, as some one might take a fancy to something. One time I was out about 1,000 miles from nowhere and some son-of-a-sea-cook stole all my salt, and you want to try living without salt and see how it goes.

"Ask Adventure" service costs you nothing but reply postage.

Fashions in Funnels

WHAT'S the truth about the subjoined?

Question:—"Some time ago I read an article in some magazine or paper. It was about British steamships and cited the *Mauretania* for a concrete case.

The writer of the article declared that like everything else the trans-Atlantic liners had to be in fashion. Furthermore he stated that four funnels were not necessary on such boats but that three or sometimes two were dummies. All this, he said, was because of the fact that the traveling public like ships that appear, to say the least, to be gigantic and massive.

This I casually mentioned to a friend of mine connected with the Cunard people in town. He laughed at that idea and said there was no truth whatever in the article. It seems probable to me, and I would like to find out if it was the truth or just a dream from the fertile brain of a reporter."—NORMAN A. BOLAND, Toronto, Canada.

Answer, by Captain Dingle:—I too heard something of the kind concerning the fourth funnel. It was stated that the after funnel was merely a casing for the galley-stacks and sundry exhausts, etc.; but personally I think there is no doubt that except for purposes of deliberate deception, as in camouflage, steamship people do not play make believe to the extent of adding funnels unnecessarily. Such a steamer as the *Mauretania* could do with one funnel, of course; but to give the requisite draft to her fires that funnel would have to be of such dimensions as to look like a gas tank on deck, and then "Bang!" goes grace and beauty of line.

While I have never been in a four-funneler, I have been in ships of one, two, and three funnels, and have never come across extra weight being built into the topsides of a steamer without good reason. In the interests of stability alone a builder is more likely to cut out a funnel than to add one.

I can not undertake to state with any degree of conviction that the *Mauretania's* fourth funnel is not a dummy; I can only express my disbelief in such a yarn.

Send question direct to expert in charge—NOT to the magazine.

A French-Spoliation Claimant

IT MIGHT be pointed out in passing—and the remark is not intended to have any bearing on this inquirer's status—that one controlling reason why Uncle Sam stalls the French-Spoliation Claims is found in the fact that many of these claims were bought up years ago by speculators at a tiny fraction of their face value:

Question:—"I am trying to trace down some family history and have been referred to you as a possible chance to get some help, as you are familiar with old-time shipping history; therefore if you can give me any information it will be greatly and I can assure you honestly appreciated.

I have spent a great deal of time and no little expense in trying to get information I desire, but up to this time have had very little success.

My great-grandfather was master of a vessel sailing out of Cape Ann, now called Gloucester, and during the war of 1812 was taken prisoner with his boat and crew and imprisoned on Guadeloupe Island, where he died of yellow fever.

It has been handed down to us from other generations that there is a claim settled by our Government that has taken care of these men who lost their boats and cargo during that period, but from what little records that I have been able to find I do not locate what I wish to find.

Could you give me any information on the matter in relation to such a claim?

Where is this island of Guadeloupe situated?

Is there any one there to whom I might write to, to ask for information?

Is there an American consul near to whom I might write?

Is there any one from whom you might think I would be able to get any information?"—W. E. Easler, West Scarboro, Me.

Answer, by Mr. Beriah Brown:—If your ancestor was taken prisoner and died in the island of Guadeloupe he was captured by the French, who were preying on our commerce in the last half of the eighteenth century, trying to prevent our trading with the English during the wars of that period. Guadeloupe is in the French West Indies.

Our Government did assume the payment of all claims of its citizens against France growing out of the seizure of our ships during that period. Payment of these claims on our part was one of the considerations of the Louisiana Purchase.

But in the more than one hundred years which have elapsed since that time Congress has made no appropriation for the payment of these claims. The furthest it has gone in that direction has been to authorize the bringing of suit against the Government in the Court of Claims and the making full proof of the legitimacy of the claims. Suits have been brought and the legitimacy of claims established to the amount of hundreds of thousands of dollars, but none have been paid.

Your family may have a legitimate claim against the Government, but you can see by this whether it is worth while spending time and money to hunting down the facts. I know one man who devoted fifty years of his life to the establishment of these claims and who died penniless, although a potential millionaire had the Government lived up to its obligations.

LOST TRAILS

Note—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

DE HART, BUCKEY. Five feet, six inches tall, weighs about 145 pounds. Structural iron worker by trade. Last seen in Youngstown, Ohio, 1917. Later heard of in the Field Artillery in France. Write your old pal Bob, General Delivery, Sioux Falls, S. D.

BARKER, ROBERT. (Slim) Since our ways parted at Omaha fourteen years ago I have covered the world, hoping to meet you again, dear old pal. Wherever you are send word to your friend—Address Terry O'Donnell, 6651 University Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the first February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

BROWN, D. B. Native of Canada. Civil engineer and R. R. builder in Guatemala, twenty years ago. Last heard from in Brazil 1908. Any information will be appreciated—Address T. L. Rea, Hotel Harvard, San Diego, Cal.

SPERRY, FRANK E. Left Orcutt, Cal., December, 1915. Not heard from since. Barber by trade. Left thumb cut off at first joint. Has wife and three children who would like any information concerning him—Address Mrs. Nellie C. Sperry, Box 553, Napa, Cal.

PIERCE, AUSTIN R. and STANLEY J. PIERCE. Please write—Address C. L. Pierce, 21 Gladys St., San Francisco, Cal.

BEVANS, CHARLES. Forty-one years old. Five feet, eight inches tall, weighs 179 pounds, scar of lance mark on right jaw. Left Bridgeport, Conn., in 1915. Any information as to his whereabouts please write—Address William E. Burton, Washington and Madison Aves., Bridgeport, Conn.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the first February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

HEALD, WESLEY or HENRY. Formerly of Fort William, Ontario. Last heard of in 1916. Please write your old pal—Address H. H. Long, care of Radio Corporation of America, 326 Broadway, New York. N. Y.

CATCHINGS, JEWEL (JIMMIE). Write to me at once—Address Happy. P. O. Box 94, Belton, Texas.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

PERRY, C. G. Discharged from overseas service at Fort D. A. Russell, Wyoming, about March, 1919. Last heard of in Denver, Colo. Any information as to his present whereabouts will be appreciated—Address Pvt. Henry K. Briner, Marine Guard, Magazine Island, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

ROY. Write me—Address John Summers, L. B. 5, Moulton, Iowa.

PFEIFFER, H. A. Working in "Baltimore Lunch," Detroit, in 1917. Enlisted in Navy. Last heard of in 1918 from New Jersey. Please write.—Address ALF. PAUL BRISTLE, General Delivery, New York, N. Y.

BROWN, MRS. LOTTIE ATKINS. Née Coles. Left Alaska on steamship for Maryland (East Coast) several years ago. Write your husband.—EDWARD L. BROWN, Togus, Maine.

LINDSAY, WILLARD C. Ex U. S. Marine. Probably in Santo Domingo. Please write—Address STAN. TRAVERS, So. San Antonio, Texas.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

SHIRLEY, ALFRED. Ex R. A. F. Wireless Section. Would like to hear from you—Address STAN. TRAVERS, So. San Antonio, Texas.

DREW, WILLIAM. Last seen at Tremonton, Utah, 1913. Five feet eight inches tall, weighs about 150 pounds, age about fifty. Dad write to your son. Have news for you—Address CLIFFORD DREW, Co. C. 4th Motor Repair Battalion, M. T. C., Presidio, San Francisco, Cal.

THE following have been inquired for in either the Mid-July or First August issues of Adventure. They can get name of inquirer from this magazine:

ALDERMAN, JOHN; Baird, Charles Oliver; Billy; Brick; Brown, Chester L.; Burns, Jim; Cashore, Lawrence H.; Current, Mary; D'Aubert, Vincent; Dixon, Lt. Harry Allen; Dubey, Louis Aoril Coie; Durst, Paul; Ferris, Curtis P.; Ford, Robert; Goodman, T. V.; Gore, Lena L.; Hammon, W. P.; Hull, Harry H.; Jordan, Tommy; King, David Fillmore; Korolden, Charles J.; MacDonald, John; MacSweeney, Sgt.; McGraw, J. K.; Morris, Cecil Edward; Phillip, Frank; Plaul, Henry; Pratt, Herbert Sidney; Quick, Jack S.; Reed, Harry; Robinson, Percy; Scott, Miss Elvia Belle; Smith, Stewart Carenem; Spalding, Ralph H.; Stringer, Jesse L.; Stuart, A. G.; Tucker, James Walter; Wilkinson, Mrs. Alice Gladson Brown.

MISCELLANEOUS: Boys who served in H. C. 15th Inf. D. Co. 31st Inf. Co. C. 8th Inf. Daddy Foster, Pop Faust, Steve, Bug Moore, Hot Cakes, Jane; L. J. K.; Sailor.

MANUSCRIPTS UNCLAIMED

HASTLAR, GAL BREATH; Ruth Gilfillan; Jack P. Robinson; Miss Jimmie Banks; Lieutenant Wm. S. Hilles; Byron Chisholm; A. B. Paradis; E. E. Atkins; G. E. Hungerford; A. Gaylord; E. J. Moran; F. S. Emerson; E. Murphy; J. E. Warner; L. E. Patten; T. T. Bennett; Sinn Cardie; James Morse; R. W. Kinsey; C. H. Huntington; D. Polowe; S. C. Holston: P. Brady; Patrick O'Farrell; C. Wilman; Mrs. S. F. Williams; C. A. Cuttriss.

UNCLAIMED mail is held by Adventure for the following persons, who may obtain it by sending us present address and proof of identity.

ALDRIDGE, F. P.; Barrett, Raymond; Beaton, G. M.; Mr. and Mrs. Bennett; Bertsch, Elizabeth; Blighton, Frank; Bonner, J. S.; Bromell, Mr.; Buckley, Ray; Butterfield, E.; Carpenter, Robert S.; Carr, John; Casselberry, Lane P.; "Chink"; Clark, Ernest S.; Clark, Wilfred J.; Cleve, Jim; Clingham, Charles; Coles, Bobby; Connor, A. M.; Cook Elliott D.; Cook, William N.; Corbett, Fred P.; Courtlandt, Victor; Craun, Galen E.; De Brissac, Ricardo; Erwin, Phillip; Fisher, 1st. Sgt. R.; Gale, Geo. A.; Gallagher; Owen; Harris, Walter J.; Haskins, S. S.; Hooker, Wm. Francis; Howard, Charlie; Hughes, Frank E.; Hunt, Daniel O'Connell; Irving, Thos. L.; Jackson, Robert R.; Klug, Chas. C.; Kuckaby, William Francis; Kutcher, Sgt. Harry; Lafler, Mrs. Harry; Lancaster, C. E.; Lander, Harry; Larisey, Jack; Lee, Wm. R. M.D.; Lekki, Michael; "Lonely Jock"; Lovett, Harold S.; MacDonald, Tony; McAdams, W. B.; Macintosh, D. T. A.; McNair, Henry S.; Mendelson, Aleck; Nelson, Frank Lovell; Noll, Leslie S.; Nylander, Towne J.; O'Hara, Jack; Parker, Dr. M.; Parker, G. A.; Parrott, Pvt. D. C.; Phillips, Bufington; Phipps, Corbett C.; Pigeon, A. H.; Posner, Geo. A.; Pulis, H. F.; Raines, Wm. L.; Rich, Wagoner Bob; Roberts, Walter; Rogan, Chas. B.; Rudolph, F.; Rundle, Merrill G.; Ryder, H. S.; St. Claire, Fred; Schmidt, G.; Scott, James F.; Shaw, Albert; Sloan, Charles A.; Smith, C. O.; Starr, Ted; Stocking, C. B.; Strong, Clarence B.; Taylor, C. W.; Van Tyler, Chester; Von Gelucke, Byron; Ward, Frank B.; Weintrauk, H. W.; Wiley, Floyd; Williams, Capt. W. P.; Wood, George; J. C. H.; T. W. S.; W. W. T.; S. 177284; L. T. 439; Third Officer, S. S. *Lake Elmdale*; WS-XV.

PLEASE send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at address given us do not reach you.—Address L. B. BARRETTO, care of *Adventure.*

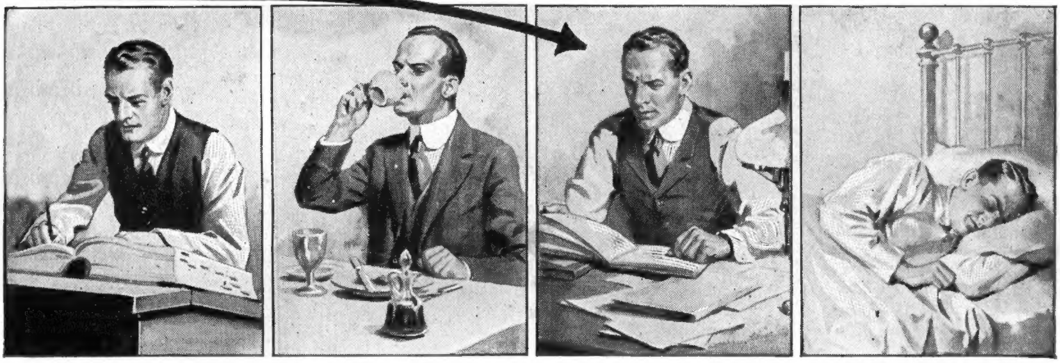
THE TRAIL AHEAD

FIRST SEPTEMBER ISSUE

BESIDE the two novelettes mentioned on the second contents page, the next issue will contain the following eleven stories. Thirteen stories in all.

THE PEOPLE OF THE FOURTH DIMENSION The shadow of the assassin in India.	*S. B. H. Hurst*
THE LUCKY CRASH The ace faces disaster.	*Thomson Burtis*
THE WEAK SPOT He promised not to fight, but—	*G. A. Wells*
THE BULLET AND THE BLAST An explosion and a mystery in the North Woods.	*Max Bonter*
MICKY'S MARQUIS When the Frenchman used his fists.	*Captain Dingle*
SANTA MARIA A Tale of the Brethren of the Main Pirate ways.	*Rafael Sabatini*
THE DOOM TRAIL A Five-Part Story Part III Renegades, red and white, prepare the torture for their captives.	*Arthur D. Howden Smith*
THE MARRIAGE MARCH Sea monsters battle in the depths.	*F. St. Mars*
THE RADIO RAY Pacific smugglers run into a new trick.	*Kenneth Gilbert*
PRIVIT MOREY, THE PAIR O' THIM "*Old Spud*" takes up a problem of discipline.	*E. O. Foster*
THE RABBIT Death in the stony places.	*Stephen Chalmers*

These Are The Hours That Count



MOST of your time is mortgaged to work, meals and sleep. But the hours after supper are *yours,* and your whole future depends on how you spend them. You can fritter them away on profitless pleasure, or you can make those hours bring you position, money, power, *real success* in life.

Thousands of splendid, good-paying positions are waiting in every field of work for men *trained to fill them.* There's a big job waiting for *you*—in your present work or any line you choose. Get ready for it! You can do it without losing a minute from work, or a wink of sleep, without hurrying a single meal, and with plenty of time left for recreation. You can do it in one hour after supper each night, right at home, through the International Correspondence Schools.

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BOX 2006-C **SCRANTON, PA.**

Explain, without obligating me, how I can qualify for the position, or in the subject, *before* which I mark X.

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☐ Electric Lighting and Rwys.
☐ Electric Wiring
☐ Telegraph Engineer
☐ Telephone Work
☐ MECHANICAL ENGINEER
☐ Mechanical Draftsman
☐ Machine Shop Practice
☐ Toolmaker
☐ Gas Engine Operating
☐ CIVIL ENGINEER
☐ Surveying and Mapping
☐ MINE FOREMAN OR ENG.
☐ STATIONARY ENGINEER
☐ Marine Engineer
☐ Ship Draftsman
☐ ARCHITECT
☐ Contractor and Builder
☐ Architectural Draftsman
☐ Concrete Builder
☐ Structural Engineer
☐ PLUMBING AND HEATING
☐ Sheet Metal Worker
☐ Textile Overseer or Supt.
☐ CHEMIST
☐ Pharmacy

☐ SALESMANSHIP
☐ ADVERTISING
☐ Window Trimmer
☐ Show Card and Sign Ptg.
☐ Railroad Positions
☐ ILLUSTRATING
☐ Cartooning
☐ BUSINESS MANAGEMENT
☐ Private Secretary
☐ Business Correspondent
☐ BOOKKEEPER
☐ Stenographer and Typist
☐ Cert. Public Accountant
☐ TRAFFIC MANAGER
☐ Railway Accountant
☐ Commercial Law
☐ GOOD ENGLISH
☐ Common School Subjects
☐ CIVIL SERVICE
☐ Railway Mail Clerk
☐ AUTOMOBILES
☐ Mathematics
☐ Navigation
☐ AGRICULTURE
☐ Poultry Raising

☐ Spanish
☐ Teacher
☐ Banking

Name____________________

Present Occupation______________ Business Address______________ 8-1-21

Street and No.____________________

City______________ State______________

Canadians may send this coupon to International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada

With acknowledgments to K. C. B.

Racy Yarns
Have you read our K·C·B·

Good Investments—that's where this lad lived

YOU NEVER can tell.
* * *
FROM THE cover on the book.
* * *
HOW THE story.
* * *
IS GOING to turn out.
* * *
THE OTHER night f'rinstance.
* * *
I WATCHED the customers.
* * *
AT A news and cigar stand.
* * *
AND A clerical gentleman.
* * *
BOUGHT A copy.
* * *
OF "RACY Yarns".
* * *
AND A gay thing bought.
* * *
THE "ANTHROPOLOGICAL Review".
* * *
AND A six-foot husk.
* * *
THE "LADIES Boon Companion"
* * *
SO WHEN a limousine.
* * *
STOPPED TO demobiliz
* * *
A DIGNIFIED Wall Streeter.
* * *
IN A cutaway coat.
* * *
I THOUGHT to myself
* * *
AS HE steered for the cigars.
* * *
"HERE'S WHERE I get.
* * *
A REGULAR thrill.
* * *
THIS MAN won't stop.
* * *
AT ANYTHING under.
* * *
A DOLLAR Havana".
* * *
BUT NO, Watson.
* * *
YOU'RE ALL wrong.
* * *
HE SLAPPED down two dimes.
* * *
AND SAID in a loud voice.
* * *
"GIVE ME a package.
* * *
OF THOSE cigarettes.
* * *
THAT SATISFY.
* * *

They Satisfy

WALL Streeter or not, you're looking for twenty cents' *worth* for twenty cents, aren't you? Here's where you get it *plus.* Best of Turkish blended with the best of Burley and other choice Domestic tobaccos—and blended *right!* No wonder the wise ones pick the "satisfy-blend".

They Satisfy
Chesterfield
CIGARETTES

LIGGETT & MYERS TOBACCO CO.